

Friendship is a Sorry Excuse

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Summary: Sequel to Wedding Bells. Over a year has passed since the wedding. Will Candace be able to fix what she has done and mend Stan's broken heart? Will he let her? What will happen later on for them? Slightly Orange. Epilogue and "B-side/Bonus" are up!

1. One Year Later

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro. I do not own the state of New York or any cities, providences, streets, etc. in/near it either. Hell, I don't own any land except for my room, which has everyone else's crap in it. I only own Candace. Annik was used from the book Girls in Pants: The Third Summer of the Sisterhood, but I adapted her. Lakin...well, she's not very important! XD

Author's Note: Hah! I did it right this time! All of my AN's and whatnot are intact! XD

Chapter One: One Year Later

Maxwell felt a cold, wet sensation along with the unpleasant sting of Stan's snowball's blast as it hit the back of his head, falling down into his hood.

"Hey!"

"C'mon, Max!"

"Well, you asked for it..." Maxwell growled as he bunched up some snow and compressed it into a sphere. He moved his arm back, preparing to fire and threw with all his might. Stan began running from it, towards the hill. His bootlace came undone and he tripped, rolling down the miniature mountain.

Sandy, from her spot on a nearby bench, screamed. She wobbled along with Maxwell as he ran to the top of the hill and looked down to see

where Stan landed.

-.--.

Stan stood up, brushed the glittery snow off of himself, and readjusted his hat. He turned around to walk back up the hill. That's when he saw her.

She was sketching on canvas with a small piece of charcoal. Stan stared in wonder with each neat stroke she made until the drawing was done. The ham took out a paintbrush and palette from her bag, which lay frozen on the ground next to her. Taking out a few paints, she globed the hues onto the palette she grasped. Her paw began to fly across the canvas, coloring what used to be colorless, making it a work of art. But, her talent didn't change Stan's opinion about the girl. In his eyes, she was still The Heartbreaker formerly known as Candace Fox.

-.--.

Candace began packing up. One by one, she put the paint tubes back. She washed the palette off with snow. The paintbrush was neatly lined up with the others and she folded up her stand. Taking her painting cautiously, she tried not to smudge it. She began to stride off towards the hill, finally noticing that she wasn't the only one by the lake.

Candace froze, dropping her bag and nearly breaking her painting when she saw him. Stan remained still, as he had for the past twenty or so minutes. All was quiet. All was silent. All was awkward, and silent, and strange. That's when Candace pointed to Stan's foot and said

"Your lace is undone." They left it at that and walked away.

-.--.

Sandy ran up to her brother.

"Oh my gosh, Stan! I was worried sick. Are you okay? Did you get hurt? where were y- Stanley...?"

As they embraced, Sandy noticed Stan's eyes had the same broken look to them as they did the day after her and Maxwell's wedding. Stan was staring back at his sister and noticed her shed tears had begun forming tiny icicles on her whiskers. Stan noticed this at the same time Sandy noticed his unshed ones were forming icicles around his heart.

"Oh Stan..." Sandy sighed, already guessing what had happened.

-.--.

Stan returned to Central Park the next day in hopes of finding Candace there. He didn't know why; maybe because he needed to see her again, to confirm that yesterday had really taken place. Or maybe because he vainly wanted to be with her. Whatever it was, he wouldn't rest until he lay his eyes upon her once more.

He found her, but she was not alone. She and many others sat; easels, canvases, and charcoals at paw. It was a class, Stan inferred, because there was a woman walking around commenting on the supposed students' work. She had Candace's painting and walked over to her.

"Oh. Hey, Annik."

"Hello, Candace. Here's your project.", Annik said, handing her the painting.

Candace flipped it over to see her grade. She beamed up at Annik.

"Thank you."

"You earned it yourself." The instructor walked away to another student.

-.--.

"What did you get?"

"Well, I don't like to brag, Lakin..." Candace smirked at her friend, who turned the picture over.

"You bitch!", Lakin yelled, pretend-mad and playfully slapped Candace as she laughed. "An A? Annik only gave me a C plus! What makes you so spe-"

Candace was looking away, towards something. She froze a few yards from Lakin, who then noticed Stan.

"Who's that?" Lakin smiled towards him.

"Stan," Candace muttered through gritted teeth, not moving her lips because Stan stared back at her.

"You mean Stan Stan, Stan-your FWB- Stan?"

"Stan Williams- as in Stan, the bride's brother."

"Oooh...Same thing! Is it not?"

"No. It is not."

"Well, hey. Since you never hooked up with him, do you think I'd have a chance?"

"Lakin..." Candace groaned, slapping her paw to her forehead.

They approached him moments later. Stan walked closer.

"Hey."

"Hi."

"You go to art school?"

"A few classes."

"Cool. Who's your friend?"

"Lakin."

"Hey...!" Lakin said. She was the only one in the conversation who didn't sound robotic.

"Hi. I guess I'll go now. See ya."

"Bye-Q."

"See ya, cutie." Stan left. "He SO digs me!" Candace sweat dropped.

— • — • — •

It pained Candace to see him and remember the times when everything was okay, when they could tell each other anything and everything and spoof each other all the time. The times when they could have fun and be childish while still having a very strong and mature bond. She truly missed that.

What if she had openly returned Stan's feeling? Would they have still had as much fun?

It would certainly be better than this bitter silence, she decided.

[illegible]

Hey, all! I couldn't sleep, so I decided to put up the first chapter of the sequel. Hope it's as good as the first so far. (yawn) Anyone ready for school? I know I'm not, but it starts tomorrow, so what am I gonna do? Thanks for reading, review if you want to. (Even if I weren't so tired, I still wouldn't boss you guys around.)

Note to Elric24: Hurry up with that story, would ya! (She's the only one I'll be bossing. haha.)

2. A Flicker of Light

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro or NY. I only own Candace.

Chapter Two: A Flicker of Light

Candace walked around numbly. The small silky box in her paws lay unopened. Fumbling around in her apartment some more, she thought.

'Should I open it? Should I keep it shut? Who is it from? Is it from Daddy or William? Hmmmm...' What a predicament. She fingered the velvet ribbon, beginning to pull.

— • — • — •

Stan sat on his cot in the hotel, reflecting on what had happened on Christmas Eve, a mere nine hours before.

Maxwell had gone with him to the local jewelers. He picked out a beautiful necklace for Sandy's Christmas present. It had a stunning pure gold chain and diamonds studded the golden heart. In the center was a ruby, and next to it was an emerald. Maxwell imagined his wife's eyes shimmering in delight as he pointed out the necklace to the sales clerk.

As they walked out, Maxwell inquired about what Stan had picked out, seeing it in his paw.

"Who's it for?" Stan only smiled.

"Someone..." Maxwell sighed and dropped the subject.

-.--..

Candace pulled a little more. Slowly, ever so slowly, she untied the neat little bow, letting the small strip of velvet dance its way to the cold hardwood floor of her room. She began opening the box, but quickly shut it and set it on her bed seeing a slip of paper in it. She took a deep breath and wiped the sweat off of her forehead. She attempted to open it again.

-.--..

Stan lay back on the cot, looking over at his nightstand where the half-full pad and pen lay, just as he'd left them the night before.

'Hmmmm... How should I start this?' Stan tapped his pen to the table. He began writing, quickly scribbling it out and ripping the page out, throwing it away. An idea popped into his head. He wrote on another sheet. This time, he was satisfied. Folding the paper up, he placed it in the box.

-.--..

Candace opened the tiny box and saw them. They seemed to radiate against the velvet background. Pearls. The whitest she'd ever seen. Her eyes widened and twinkled in admiration.

Then she began unfolding the note. It took her forever to do so, but when she finally got it all the way open...

-.--..

Stan had no regrets. Well, at least not anymore. He did what he did last night because he needed closure- or opensure. Whatever it was, it had been succeeded. But, why did he still feel restless?

Stan quietly snuck out of the room, trying not to wake Sandy or Maxwell. He crept to the desk and asked for her address. Taking the printout the bellhop gave him, he followed it- every block, road, and sign -until he got there.

_He went to the barred door, found many mailbox chutes and found her

"Yeah. It's just... Do I look alright?"

"Of course. You look great! Why?"

"Well, there aren't very many pretty maternity dresses out there and-" she sighed. "Gosh, I can't wait for this baby to come!" Sandy laughed. Her husband and brother joined her.

"None of us can," Maxwell said gently, kissing the top of her head. She sighed again.

-.--.

The trio sat in the theatre for a few moments. Sandy and Maxwell carried on a conversation while Stan eavesdropped on others'.

- "What time should we meet them?"

"How 'bout seven-ish?"

"Sure."

- "Oh no! I spilled!"

"It's no biggie. Besides, no one's gonna see you, it's going to be dark."

- "My aunt drives a taxi. I'll call her to see if she could pick us up."

- "Aww Mom..."

"You heard your mother."

- "Oh. Hold on. My phone's ringing. Hello?"

- "What's taking so long?"

"Other hamsters are coming in, sweetheart."

- "Do you know any of the actors?"

- "Sir, could you get your paw off my leg?"

"Oh, so sorry, ma'am."

"No problem."

- "I hear this play's pretty good."

"It should be, Candace Fox is in it."

'Candace is in this play?' Stan's eyes widened and he gripped the chair's arm harder.

"Ow!"

"Sorry, sis." Stan accidentally squeezed Sandy's wrist along with the armrest. He felt a small, almost unnoticeable thrust from his

sister's abdomen. "See, your baby's already stickin' up for you."

Sandy giggled. "I think we have a football star on our paws." The twins laughed hysterically, getting strange looks from every one around them, including Maxwell, who hadn't heard their conversation.

The blue satin of the curtains swayed, beginning to spread apart, showing the dark scene before the lights turned on the stage. The tiger-hams' laughter ceased.

Out came a man in a top hat and striped slacks. He carried a cane and paced around with it. He began talking to an elderly man about some bank deal and moving west and then left.

Then, once the curtains opened again, Candace stepped out. She and a bunch of women around her did a dance number in their showgirl outfits, but since she had the more important role, hers was more elaborate.

All of the others had black leotards with poofy skirts and yellow feathers in their tiny headdresses. Candace had a big pink feather instead of a small yellow one. Her leotard was gray and she wore a bright pink skirt. Her tap shoes were bright and shined and her make-up was done well.

The play continued for about two hours, all of which Sandy kept getting up to use the restroom, and ended with Candace and the Top Hat Man, which Stan had dubbed him, dancing.

-.--.

"I'm like, really sorry guys. I swear, this baby thinks my bladder is a stress ball," Sandy said, excusing herself from the backstage festivities. Maxwell's face held an expression of concern. "You go ahead. I'll meet you back at the hotel." She handed Maxwell her pass and walked off.

Stan turned to his friend, confused as Maxwell handed him the pass. They began to walk backstage, where boisterous music blared from the stereo.

Hamsters all around were drinking and making-out. Some even smoked. One particular couple caught Stan's eye with their raunchy movements as they got pretty "hot 'n heavy". Maxwell slapped the drooling ham's shoulder to snap him out of it. They continued on until a redheaded showgirl tripped over to Stan.

"You're hot..." she drawled.

"Um...Thanks?" Stan began to walk off, but the girl grabbed him.

"I really mean it," she toppled on him, hic-upping.

"Okay. I believe you," Stan said, cautiously peeling her arms off him.

"Take me away with you!" The girl tackled Stan down as Maxwell continued on.

-.--.

"And, like Sandy warned you earlier, just because you think a girl is pretty and she just so happens to be drunk, doesn't mean you take advantage of her." Maxwell looked to his right where he thought Stan was still walking. "Am I clear?" He quickly noticed his friend was missing when a familiar voice was screaming from the other side of the room.

"RAPE! RAPE! Someone get this chic off me!" Stan shrieked. No one was paying attention to him because they were either drunk or too busy partying.

Maxwell ran in the direction of his buddy's scream. That's when he saw Candace.

"Roxi! What's the matter with you!" Candace yelled as she ripped the girl from Stan.

"He's hot..." Roxanne drooled, grinning.

"You're drunk, aren't you?" Candace teared up.

"No duh!" Roxanne cackled. Maxwell came over and lifted his lipstick-covered, pantless friend up off the ground.

"I'm so sorry about this," Candace apologized for Roxanne, not noticing who she was speaking to.

"It's okay, Candace."

"Max? Hi!" She wiped her tears of frustration away at seeing his friendly face. "How are you? Where's Sandy?"

"She's at the hotel. She wasn't feeling well."

"Oh... Cold? Virus?"

"She's... p-pregnant," Maxwell said bashfully, blushing.

"Really! Wow..." Then she smirked and elbowed Maxwell in the ribs. "Way to go, Max," she said slyly as he blushed even more. She giggled. "But really, that's great news! When's she due?"

"The end of January to mid-February."

"Ahh... A winter baby. That's so cool."

"I have to take a piss," Roxanne interrupted, laughing at her use of words.

"I guess I'll see you around..." Her eyes were on Maxwell, but it was directed to Stan.

"Bye," Maxwell said.

"See ya, Candy-ace," Stan said. She looked back and smiled a bit, too distracted with her friend's behavior.

Maybe this could work out after all...

[illegible]

LABOR DAY! NO SCHOOL TODAY! HOO-PLAH!

Okay, people. I need some help. (No duh) But, seriously, I need suggestions. A.) What should the baby's gender be? and B.) What should they be named? I'll take ****all**** suggestions nicely, but please don't be mad if I don't use yours. I have an idea of my own, but I want to see if yours are better. If you agree with my idea, say so OR if you agree with my idea and want to make a suggestion, I'll accept that too. (Is this making any sense?) Anywayâ€¦It would be a girl and they'd name her Starlette Rose. The end. Thanks for reading! I hope this chapter made up for the shortness of the last one!

4. A New Year, A New Beginning

Chapter Four: A New Year, A New Beginning

Two Days Later...

"Are you sure you don't want to come?" Maxwell asked, trying to keep his balance. Sandy was already out there, twirling and gliding gracefully.

"Yeah. Besides, couples' skate is next." His friend frowned. "I'll watch you guys from here. It's fine."

"Alright..."

It seemed as though there weren't very many singles in New York. And the ones that were probably wouldn't be caught dead at an ice rink, as exciting as it was.

Stan found himself listening in on other hamsters' conversations again when he saw her. His heart just about burst through his chest.

"C'mon, Daddy!" she called.

A grey hamster wearing a brown leather jacket with a badge on it sat on the bench, shaking his head slowly.

"Daddy..." she whined. "I promise I won't go fast."

"Candace, I'm tired. I only came here to spend New Year's Eve with you, not break my neck."

"But, Dad... I can't skate alone, it's not free skate anymore."

"Well, stay here until it is again. I'll watch you then, Hon." Candace began to tear up and frowned. Just as she skated towards the carpeted lounge area, Stan swooped in.

"I'll skate with ya," he offered. She wiped her tears away.

"Okay. Thanks." She turned around and playfully stuck her tongue out at her fretting father. Stan looked back to see the man glare at him.

"What's up with your Pops?"

" A.) He doesn't know you. B.) He can't stand to see me grow up and do things with boys."

"Oh."

"Oh! And C.) He's a cop."

"Ouch. Guess I better behave myself, then." Candace giggled.

They talked and skated like this for a long time, occasionally bumping into Sandy and Maxwell and chatting with them. Then it became quiet so Candace casually asked,

"So, did you ever find that dream girl?"

"Yeah..."

"Where is she?"

"Approximately three feet away." He took three strides towards her.

"Oh Stan..." Candace sighed, giggling. He pecked her on the cheek and zoomed off, leaving her frozen as she skidded on the ice, touching her cheek and blushing.

Stan returned by her side in a flash after his lap around the rink. He grabbed her arm and they flew around on the ice, having a good time.

"Hey, how 'bout we blow this popsicle stand," Stan suggested.

Candace laughed at his pun. "Sure. But where do we go?"

"I dunno. You pick. You live here!" She thought for a moment.

"I know!" Candace grabbed his arm and led him away.

-.--.

"Holy Ham! That's one big Christmas tree!" Stan exclaimed, nearly swearing at its size.

The tree towered at about eighty feet tall and its beautiful bushy branches were adorned with ornaments of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Candace made faces in a redish purple one, looking at her reflection and laughing all the while.

"Yup. Rockefeller Center has the biggest one I know of," Candace boasted. "I bet Pennsylvania doesn't have that."

"Nope. Thank God!" She giggled. "I mean, geez. With all the hicks around where I live, it'd never get taken down! But, it sure is

beautiful." Stan's eyes twinkled.

"So are those earrings you gave me. I didn't have time to thank you for them earlier, but I really love them. See?" She pulled her hair away from her ears, revealing the present she received from him.

"Rrrrr... Smokin'." Candace rolled her eyes and smiled, blushing.

Something caught her eye and she pointed upward. Her eyes brightened.

"Look!"

The giant ball started its minute-long decent. It fell. It turned colors. It turned colors as it fell. Stan and Candace turned their attention from the big, lovely tree to the flashy display up ahead.

"When I was a little girl," Candace started, still looking up, "I used to get mad and yell at my parents for not keeping me up long enough to see the ball drop. Isn't it funny how little kids are?"

"Mhm..." San replied, absent-mindedly. The ball was almost at the bottom.

"Ten... nine... eight... seven..." Stan grabbed Candace's paws and turned towards her. She looked back at him. Gazing into each others' eyes, they continued their simultaneous counting. "Six... _five... four... three... two..., ... one!_"

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!" hamsters shouted.

Stan leaned in, Candace didn't pull away. He dipped her back and lay his lips upon hers. She didn't resist; she returned the kiss, putting her paws on his cheeks. Candace pulled Stan closer, closer to her. He embraced her harder and tipped her back a little more, more, more... too much. They fell into the frigid snow drift.

Stan's body was lifted up with Candace's belly as she giggled. He hovered over her, not wanting to get too heavy. He began to laugh as well. He pecked on her nose, continuing the kiss. Sometimes Candace would begin to laugh, disturbing the mood.

"Good grief, Candace! Would you knock it off? I'm trying to be as romantic as I can here!" he yelled, jokingly, standing up and pulling her with him. She laughed even harder. Once her laughter got too painful, she stopped and hugged Stan, sighing.

"You know what?"

"What?"

"You're a better kisser than I remember. Have you been practicing?"

Stan laughed. "Well, I've had more than a year to..."

Candace laughed, too. She pressed her face to his coat and moved it out of the way. Taking in his scent, her lips began to tickle his neck.

"Heh heh. Candace, stop. Please." Stan contained his laughter as he sheepishly grinned. She obeyed.

Looking into his celery-colored eyes, past the irises, past the pupils, and very deep beyond them, Candace could see the searing pain Stan tried so hard to conceal. Her eyes magnified it. Stan noticed this and remembered what his mother had always told he and Sandy.

'If you feel someone's emotions as strong or stronger than their own, that means you truly love them...'

Looking into Candace's soft eyes, he could see that, from seeing his pain, her heart shattered into a billion pieces, while his own had only broken into a couple thousand.

"Oh Candy..." he sighed, holding her in his arms. She snuggled closer to him.

This was the beginning. They needed to know each other like this. They needed to. Stan thought they already had...

[illegible]

Hello, all. Was this long enough for you? I hope so. (sigh) Just waiting for reviews... Don't say anything if you don't wanna, it would just be nice. Ahem. NICE, Mel...

5. Little Black List

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro or NY. I only own Candace, Tom, and as of now, Will. (You won't hear much from him after this chapter.)

Chapter Five: Little Black List

The next morning, Stan awoke to the usual sound of Sandy's vomiting. He cringed and thanked God he wasn't a woman. Well, for this and many more painful reasons like childbirth and menstruation.

When he thought about the last reason, he remembered Candace's issue at the hotel last September. He became lost in thoughts of his angel sweet.

Candace Candace ** Candace**...

His heart exploded at the very thought of her. Her smile, her laugh,... her kiss... Oh God yes, her kiss. Sweet and tender, yet sexy, passionate, and a bit lustful too. Just the right blend.

Stan's heart ached too much, seeing that his cot was completely empty, except for himself, of course. He wanted her near. He wanted to hold her and be held back. He got up.

-.-.-.

Maxwell looked at Stan, baffled. He was all dressed and ready to go someplace. It was only a few minutes past seven.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm gonna see Candace." Maxwell choked on his Veggie-O's.

"What! C-Candace?" he coughed.

"Yeah. What of it?"

"Nothing. It's just... it's just... Is that why you were out so late last night?"

"Mhmh."

"Are you guys...?"

"... Steady?" Maxwell nodded in pure dread, yet his eyes sparkled with the slightest hope. "No. In fact, I have no idea _what_ we are! Last night was just so... random."

"What exactly happened?"

"Well, first, I saw her trying to get her dad to skate with her, but he didn't feel up to it. I decided to skate with her instead. She thanked me for the present--"

"What present?" Maxwell asked in interest. Stan indicated Sandy's necklace, which sat on the table. "That's who it was for?" Maxwell guessed Stan meant the place where they got the stuff, not the necklace. Stan nodded. "Then what?"

"Well, we were at Rockefeller Center when she thanked me- we got bored of skating, so she took me there - And then the ball dropped."

"Did you kiss her?" Maxwell seemed so intrigued, Stan wondered why he hadn't taken out his observations notebook yet. He decided to satisfy his friend's thirst for information, so he slightly embellished his tale.

"Man! Did I kiss her!" Maxwell sweat dropped. "But, don't worry, dude. That's all we did. I promise." Maxwell sighed, relieved as Stan began to walking to the door.

"Why don't you wait a while, grab a bite to eat before you go? Give Candace some time to wake up."

"Sure. But, I'm so excited, I don't know if I _can_ eat!"

"You must really like her..."

"Yeah... I can't wait to see her again," Stan breathed. The friends smiled as Sandy walked over to the table to join them.

-.-.-.

"Hey," he said softly. Candace's eyes fluttered open, seeing the crouching figure knelt beside her bed.

"How'd _you _get in here? I thought Daddy worked midnight shift."

"Mrs. Rosalini buzzed me in."

"Oh... Happy New Year!" Candace whispered.

"Oh, it will be..." he said slyly, looking sheepish as he leaned in closer...

-.-.-.

"Hey Stan, what's up? You're up earlier than usual," Sandy said, pouring herself a glass of juice.

"Nothin' much. I'm going over to Candace's in a bit."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Oh! And she says she'll drop something off for ya in a few days."

"Aww. That's so nice of her. I wonder what it is."

"Dunno. But, she seemed really excited about it."

"So... does this mean you guys are-" Maxwell's watch went off.

"I have to go. That business meeting isn't going to attend itself, you know." He kissed his wife quickly, grabbing his coat and walked out to the street where he called a cab.

"Are you two..." Sandy looked for the right words. "Seeing each other?"

"Nah," Stan said, with a wave of his paw. His sister looked disappointed.

"You aren't?"

"No... I really, really want to though." Sandy smiled, but quickly frowned, thinking of something.

"Stan...? Do you know if she... um..."

"Feels the same?" Sandy nodded. "With that kiss we shared last night, I wouldn't doubt it," her brother triumphantly said with confidence.

"You kissed!" Sandy squealed. Stan blushed.

"Mhm..."

"Eek! I'm soooo calling the girls!"

"Sandy, I-" Sandy grabbed her cell phone and locked herself in the bathroom, slamming the door. "Great. I'm probably jinxed now..." Stan muttered, stepping out.

-.--.

"Hey, Candy? You awake?" Stan buzzed again. A man came on the intercom.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Fox?"

"Sure..."

Stan's ears tingled from the sound of this unfamiliar voice. This wasn't Candace's father, he guessed. But who could it be? Why were they there?

"Is Candace there?" Stan asked nervously.

"Nah..." they started sarcastically. "This is_ only_ her apartment, DipShit."

"Yeah. You're right. So, what are _you _doing in there?"

"Screw off, punk."

"Dude, cut it out. I just wanna see my girl. Let me in." The man scoffed on the other end.

"_Your_ girl? Did Candace not tell you she's already seeing _me_?"

Stan gasped. Was he just a fling for her? Had he been used? He sucked in some air, trying to breathe. He couldn't. He felt dizzy and sick with despair. He had fallen for her... again... Again, she didn't return his feelings, again, his heart broke, yearning for her, again, he ended up genuinely sad.

He leaned his back on the wall, sliding down it and landing on the stone-cold pavement, where he sat. He buried his face in his gloved paws and sobbed. Why was this happening again? Is this why Maxwell had seemed so skeptic; so his friend wouldn't get hurt again? Why hadn't he taken his buddy's silent warning?

Because he was a fool. A damn, damned fool. Why do fools fall in love?- Especially with absolutely beautiful angels such as Miss Fox? Why did God allow them to tread amongst ugly simpletons like him, when it clearly should be against the law?

"Stan...?" her voice was quiet and raw, almost desperate. "Are you still there?" Scratch desperate, she sounded a bit worried. Stan stood up and violently hit the buzzer once more.

"What!? What now!? Haven't you jerked my chain around enough!? Aren't you finished leading me on? You're sick, Candace! Absolutely sick," Stan said, his voice cracked at the end as he started running off, crying.

"STAN!" He kept running; ignoring her apparent cry for help.
"William, no!" she screamed. There was a struggle. Candace gasped as the word 'bitch' was heard in the background. She was obviously being pulled away from her spot; possibly getting dragged off. Stan didn't care. He didn't want to, anyway.

-.--.

He didn't stop running. As long as he continued to run, he felt safe; like no one could catch him. He kept running until he got to Grand Central Station, where he blew off half of his spending money for a ticket home.

He ran up the steps, past the kitchen, and into Sandy and Maxwell's part of the house. There, he ran into their living room and, in a fit of rage, snatched the small box. He opened it. It played a sweet melody... one that sickened him so.

Stan raised it high above his head, ready to let it plummet and smash into a thousand trillion pieces against the floor; just like his heart. It kept playing. He kept hesitating. He stopped, shocked at himself.

'What am I doing?' He sat down on the sofa and cradled the poor music box, crying out of bitterness, pity, and woe. Sandy and Maxwell would be home in less than a week, so Stan made himself comfy and sulked on their couch for a few days.

-.--.

On the fourth day, a Sunday, Stan went to collect the papers. He sifted through them until he saw Thursday's. He gasped, eyes widening. What he saw on the front page made his stomach do flips, his heart leap into his throat. His brain buzzed.

'I should've done something...' He could have done something.

****Aspiring Hollywood Actress Raped at Own Home****

Was what the headline read. Stan kept his teary eyes glued to the article, attempting to continue.

Successful Broadway actress Candace Michelle Fox (23) was raped by a trusted family friend, William Daniel Peat (22) at her father's apartment on Oakwood Ave, New York...

Stan's vision impaired him to the point where he could only see smudges in front of him. He pounded his fist to the table in fury and ran for the streets.

-.--.

"Where have you been?" Sandy sobbed into her brother's coat.

"I went home."

"Why the Hell did you do that! Candace keeps calling, wanting to talk with you."

Hey, everyone. How was the longest chapter on earth? Thanks for the reviews, SilverAngel, lupyne! So far, the only one who replied to my idea is lupyne. Please, if you have a suggestion, say it now. Don't be shy...I don't bite. Anyway, I hope you liked this chapter, sorry I

didn't update last weekend. I wasn't feeling too hot. Well, thanks for reading, review if you want, same ol' deal here, I'm not a bossy kinda person (even to Mel nowâ€|ack!)

6. A Star is Born Pt One

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro or NY. I only own Candace and her dad. The
End.

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Author's Note: (Hey, it's at the beginning this time! XD) Since nobody got back to me on the baby issue, I went with my own idea. (Except for lupyne, that is. Thanks!) That, and this took up a lot of pages on my document thing so I made this a two-part chapter. I hope you don't mind. Sorry for the wait... ugh schoolwork... OH! AND HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TONIGHTISTHENIGHT! (AKA KAYLEIGH, BRUCE, KAY-K, KAT, ETC...)

Chapter Six: A Star is Born Pt. One

February rolled around; first, second, third...When the fourteenth came, Stan tried his very hardest to go to New York to see Candace, but it had snowed way too hard, canceling all trains coming to and going from Pennsylvania.

They had been unconventionally dating like this for over a month now. Stan knew Candace was still hurt and confused. He knew she was a bit scared too. But, she trusted him. She trusted him to take things slow, to not get too carried away... and yet, Stan wanted to move ahead, he wanted more. Was that so wrong?

He called her that night. They murmured soft, meaningful things to one another for a few hours. He hung up at ten thirty and walked into the joint kitchen, where he peeked through Sandy and Maxwell's open door and saw them snuggled up on the couch, asleep. As he shut the fridge door, he wondered whether he and Candace would ever be like that...

-.--.

Ding Dong.

Sandy went to get the door. She wobbled even more now, but when she finally answered it, Stan and Maxwell- who were at the breakfast table- heard a scream and ran to where she was.

"Oh my gosh! Candace! What are you doing here?" she cried, hugging her friend to the best of her ability. They both squealed.

"I decided to visit you guys, if you don't mind, I mean."

"Why would I mind? It's been forever!"

"Hey you," Candace said to Stan warmly.

"Hey yourself," Stan joked. She giggled, pulling something out of her coat pocket.

"Happy Valentine's day!"

He opened the box. It was an assortment of chocolate and yogurt covered sunflower seeds.

"Aww... Candace, you didn't have to," he gushed

"But I did," she smiled. Stan pecked her cheek.

"I have to go upstairs for a sec., okay?" Candace nodded. She began talking with Sandy and Maxwell until Maxwell had to leave for work.

"I really love those dresses, Candy. That was so sweet of you! How'd you know?"

"Just a hunch," Candace laughed. "I'm glad you like them. They took me forever to draw!"

Sandy smiled warmly. "So, how are you? How have you been?"

"Fine, I guess..." Sandy looked at her consolingly.

"I know, Hon. You're just trying to come back."

"I'm just glad I'm not... you know." Sandy nodded sympathetically. "I really liked Will, too. He was like a little brother..." Candace sighed, deciding to change the subject to a happier one. "So, is Stan visiting too?"

"No. He lives here; on the other half of the house. We share the kitchen."

"Ohh... I thought this place looked bigger from outside!" They laughed.

-.-.-.

"Where do you want to stay? The couch or the air mattress?" Maxwell asked a while after dinner.

"Oh. I'm sleeping in Stan's room," Candace replied.

"Oh?"

Maxwell looked over at Stan, who gave him a 'Don't worry.' look. As much as he'd hate to admit it, since last Fall, Stan had become more mature. Maxwell smiled at him.

Candace cuddled closer to Stan. He wrapped his arms around her loosely, not wanting to make her uncomfortable. She shifted around, turning to him.

"Good night, Stan."

"Sweet dreams, Candy." He knew that wasn't all she would say, just by the feel of the air.

All was quiet for a moment.

"Hey, Stan...?"

"Yeah?"

"I really missed you. And I just want you to know I'm not mad that you didn't stay and take care of Will for me. I had no idea what he said to you until Sandy told me you didn't come back to the hotel that day. I just kinda guessed he said something along the lines of us being together. Then again, the way you yelled at me should've been the tip-off."

"Wow... that came outta nowhere!... I just feel like a total ass about that. I-I should've known he was bluffing..." Candace pecked him on the lips.

"It's over now... we can move on." they snuggled together.

-.--.

Stan stood in the hall, dumbly as Candace ran around the other part of the house, getting Sandy's things. The women screamed back and forth in panicked voices. Stan didn't know what to do. He just stared on.

"Stan!"

"Yeah, sis...?" he said cautiously.

"Get. Max..."

"What?"

"NOW!" both ladies cried.

"What's going on?"

"Sandy's water broke!" Candace yelled, running out the door with Sandy.

Stan ran outside after trying to call Maxwell on his cell about seven times. Apparently, it was turned off, so Stan looked for the number to the office. He remembered it was in Sandy's purse, which Candace took with them. He tried paging him as well, only to hear the beeper go off from the kitchen. E-mail? Didn't work either. He realized he had to get him in person- er hamster after nearly two hours of trying to contact his friend. He ran downtown to the nearest phone booth and opened up the directory, searching for the address.

-.--.

... Sandy groaned and sweated. She tried not to toss and turn or curl up in a ball again. It was getting close, she could feel it... either that, or because Candace kept saying so. If this baby was so close to coming, why the Hell was it taking so long?

She had suffered being in labor for nearly four hours now and Candace was suffering too. Sandy looked up at Candace. Her friend's face was pale and dark circles formed around her weary eyes. She still

heartily roared words of encouragement to Sandy, though.

Another contraction came. Sandy bit her lower lip to keep from screaming too much.

"Uhhhh..." she groaned. The pain worsened. "UHHH. Candace! Oh God, Candace!"

The bones in Candace's paw popped and creaked with the pressure Sandy put on them. Her knuckles turned white, as Sandy's did, as the contraction raged on.

"I see something," the doctor said.

"Is it crowning?" Candace asked.

"Well... more like mooning." Candace looked confused. So did Sandy. "They're coming out backwards."

"So, you can tell us whether it's a boy or a girl? A Maxwell Tyler or a- Say, Sans, what _were_ you going to name the baby if it were a girl?"

"Starlette Rose," Sandy faintly answered after the pain subsided a bit.

"Do you really want to know right now?" Sandy looked up at Candace for an answer. She nodded back at her.

"Yes."

"Well, Mrs. Edwards. I am glad to announce that you are going to be the proud mother of a..."

-.--.

"Starlet Brooks, Starlet Avenue, Starlet Street... Geez! I don't think there could possibly be any more Starlets around here!" Stan complained, trying to find Maxwell's office building. "Ah. There it is. 8574 Starters Road." He wrote it down on a napkin and ran from the phone booth.

"Can I help you?... Sir?" the secretary asked, her eyebrow cocked at the peculiar ham.

Stan kept pacing around, looking for the room. He looked over at the lady at the desk. "Do you know where I could find Maxwell Edwards?"

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No. But, I'm his brother-in-law, and... let's just say... I'm about to be a friggin' uncle!"

"Oh! Well, in that case, right this way, sir." She pointed down the hall and to the left. Then, she hit a button and spoke on the room's intercom. "Mr. Edwards, you have a visitor."

"Oh. Hey, Stan. What's going on?" Stan didn't know how to put it. He couldn't form coherent sentences.

"Where is Maxwell Edwards?" a short man wanted to know. He glanced at

the secretary's name plate on her desk. "Sophie..." he growled, right almond-shaped eye twitching.

She held up her paws defenselessly, shaking. "Um... he... stepped out?" She let out a nervous laugh.

"Stepped out!" The man was enraged. "When will he be back?"

"Ugh..." The man stared.

"I'm waiting..."

"Ugh..."

"Yes...?" he demanded.

"Here I am, Mr. Yoo," Stan said, extending his arm.

"Um sir...?" Sophie motioned for Stan to come closer. "What are you doing?" she whispered.

"I'm covering for Max, so don't blow it," he answered, whispering as well, beginning to walk back to Mr. Yoo.

"Oh. And, sir?" Sophie clasped her paws together and subtly bowed. Stan felt stupid. No wonder the guy didn't shake his paw.

"It is an honor to have you here." Stan bowed. Mr. Yoo bowed, as well as his two assistants and a woman in her late-thirties. Stan guessed she was the secretary.

"This is Mr. Wong, on the left and this is Miss Chin," Mr. Yoo indicated his assistants. "And, this is Mrs. Lee-Woo-Chong, but you can call her Betty."

"Okay. shall we be leaving?" Stan gestured to the door and the other four left. He ran over to Sophie. "What do **Chinese** people like to do?"

Sophie shrugged. "Beats me!"

"Do you know where I'm supposed to take them?"

"No. Maxwell didn't mention that." Stan groaned.

"Damn..." He ran outside to join the others. "So...Where were we going again?"

-.--.

"Sandy, you have to let go! The baby wants out and you need to let her! Think about the look on Maxwell's face when he sees her! Sandy? Are you listening?"

Sandy whimpered. "Candace, I can't."

"Yes you can, Sans!"

"Mm-mm." Sandy shook her head.

"SANDY!" Candace angrily shouted. "You have to do this, sweetheart." Her voice softened as she crouched to her friend's level. "You're the strongest lady I've ever met. Don't try to tell me that you can't do this, because I know you can." Sandy bit her lower lip. "Breathe with me, kiddo."

-.--.

"We're going to the Shea Renee, remember Mr. Edwards?" Miss Chin said.

Stan didn't know where or what that was, so he took them to the next best thing.

The video arcade.

"He is a maniac on the floor!" Mrs. Lee-Woo- -Betty cheered.

"Alright Yoo!" Stan bellowed.

"Wong, go! Go Wong, go!" Miss Chin yelled.

"Yeah, Wong!" Stan yelled also.

"Mr. Edwards, you try," Mr. Yoo panted, wiping sweat off his brow with his already soaked tie.

So Stan climbed upon the machine and danced. Danced, danced, danced. His first song was against Miss Chin.

-.--.

Maxwell ran through the halls of the maternity ward. So far, he had walked in on two Lamaze classes, three births, and five check-ups. Had Stan played a prank on him? He thought to check at home, just in case, when he saw Candace dash towards a room with a Styrofoam cup. He followed.

"Candace!" She turned around. Her wary brown eyes filled with tears.

"You're here! I can't believe you made it. Oh Hon... you gotta get in there, Sandy is this close," Candace said in a weepy voice, making a gesture by closing her pointer finger and thumb together.

"Oh my gosh..." Maxwell gaped. Candace handed him the cup of ice chips and pushed him into the room, where he heard his wife's moaning.

"It's okay, Sandy. I'm here..." Maxwell soothed. Sandy whimpered and cried at seeing him.

"Maxy..."

"I'm here, Sandy. I've got you." He took her paws and kissed her cheek.

"Mrs. Edwards, the last push," the doctor announced. Sandy groaned and Maxwell stared in wonder.

"Good luck you two..." Candace whispered through the door and walked across the hall.

It didn't hurt as much with her husband there. Candace had been a great helper, but Sandy felt as though she could do anything with Maxwell near...

-.--.

'Ah...nothin' like a gang of drunken **Chinese** hamsters...' Stan thought, walking out of the arcade, grinning. 'They really know how to party!'

"Mr. Edwards. I just wanted to say thank you. We had a wonderful time this evening." The others nodded, agreeing with Mr. Yoo.

"Thank you for coming. I'm sorry about the inconvenience with the restaurant."

"This was better than any restaurant!" Betty squealed.

"I hope we meet again, friend."

"Me, too. Hey, call when you're in town again."

"Oh we will!" Mr. Wong said cheerfully.

"Sayonara!"

"Huh?"

Stan sweat dropped. 'Did I not say that right...?'

-.--.

Maxwell sniffled, handing the tiny thing back to her mother. Tears streamed down his face as he looked at them. His family.

"She's so pretty, guys," Candace gushed, wiping away her own tears of joy.

"Star's going to look just like her mother," Maxwell said.

"But look! She has her daddy's eyes..." Sandy cooed as the baby opened her navy blue eyes for the first time.

The couple looked at their child affectionately, then at each other lovingly. Candace knew that she didn't belong here. This was Sandy and Maxwell's moment and she wanted to keep it that way for them. She quietly crept out of the room and watched the picturesque scene get smaller as she tiredly walked off to the lounge.

-.--.

"There you are!" Stan said cheerfully, entering the lounge, striding over to Candace.

"Heeeeeeey!" Candace flung her arms around him. She stepped back a little, lifted his collar up, and playfully pulled at his tie,

slipping it off of him and put it around her own neck. She giggled. "You look so cute all dressed up," she gushed, pressing her nose to his. "So, how was the meeting?" They sat down at a table.

"Had nothing to do with money or making deals! And Max said I didn't know anything about business," Stan chuckled.

"What did you do then?"

"Played DDR." Candace giggled at the absurd situation. After a moment...

"So, have you seen Starlette yet?"

"Yeah... She's so beautiful." Stan sighed. "She's gonna break a lot of hearts." Candace seemed uncomfortable. "Somethin' wrong, babe?"

"Well..." Candace took in a breath. "I don't know how to put this..." she mumbled almost inaudibly.

"What?" Stan's eyes flickered with concern. Candace sighed, wrapping both of her paws around one of his.

"I... I think that..." Another sigh. "Maybe we should stop seeing each other." Stan gasped, wide-eyed. "But, only for a little bit," she added quickly. "It's just... we started off so... weird. I just want to do it over- begin new, you know?"

"I guess..." Stan mumbled, sadly.

"Oh sweetie... It'll only be for a month," Candace reassured him.

"Can we still be together for tonight?" Stan asked, hopefully.

"Sure." They embraced.

[illegible]

Forget about chapter five being the longest! XD Again, sorry for the...(counts on fingers) twelve-day delay! I've been so busy with school and I just didn't feel like writing... Anyway, thanks for reading! Review if you would like! Hope this made up for the wait! Happy B-day, TonightIsTheNight!

8. Luck's For the Irish

Disclaimer: I do not own anything (characters, places, etc...) from the show Hamtaro or New York or Pennsylvania, or any other state for that matter. Anyway, all I own in this fic are Candace and her dad, Star, Will, Lakin, Roxanne... all those other peeps.

AN: (I like it better at the beginning now.) I was hoping someone would mention the clients names! XD I like to test people! No, really, I tried getting a hold of my Japanese-nut friends, but none of them were home, so I decided to pull a Kayleigh and be

stupid...yeah. Not my best move, but hey...I'm not good with names anyway. Normally, I just put down random letters and if they sound cool together, I keep it. (Retarded, I know. But, I don't do that in "professional writings". I got the idea from Kay-K. Hmmm...no wonder...j/k!) Anyway, thanks for reviewing, lupyne. Hopefully a certain **someone** (coughs) Mel (cough) e24 (cough) will start reviewing again. Enjoy! Sorry if I annoy anyone with this Mary Sue crap!

Chapter Eight: Luck's for the Irish

When Candace said a month, Stan took it literally. He circled it on his calendar in red ink and had x'd through all the days that had passed. Today was St. Patrick's Day. Stan figured Candace had planned this somehow. It was a good thing, though; they needed all the luck they could get.

As he was getting ready, which took longer than it usually did, Stan heard little Starlette's cry. He hurried over to the baby and picked her up from her pen in the kitchen. Sandy and Maxwell were conked out on the sofa. Stan looked at them sympathetically.

"Shh... Are you gonna miss me? Is that it? Don't worry, Starry. Uncle Stan's just going on a date and will be back really early tomorrow morning. Hopefully, you'll get an auntie outta this. And, if I'm lucky, some cousins too." He smirked at the last part, putting Starlette's bottle in the microwave.

-.--.

Stan sighed. 'It's now or never...' He hesitated buzzing. 'Breathe in, breathe out.' Why was this so hard? It never was before...Then again, he had never been on an actual date with Candace, he realized. His finger spontaneously hit the button. 'Crap!'

"Hello?" It was Tom.

'Double crap!' Stan nervously laughed. "Hello, Mr. Fox. It's me, Stan."

"Stan?" Stan gulped.

"Mhm. Yes, sir."

"You're here for Candace, I suppose?"

"Yeah-Yes! Is she here?"

"Hold on. We'll be down there in a minute." Did he just say she'll or we'll? Stan couldn't tell.

"Daddy, you don't have anything to worry about." Stan heard from down the hall, inside.

"I just want to see this guy; see if he's good enough." They stepped outside. Candace made a sour face and was about to protest when her father reached for Stan's paw. They shook. "Nice to finally meet you."

"You too, sir." Stan smiled at Candace, she smiled back. "Shall

we?"

"Bye, Dad!"

"You kids have a nice time!" Tom called back. Stan looked back at him and he saw no scowl this time.

-.--.

With her eyes closed, Candace smiled as the bubbly fizz tickled her nose when she sipped at her soda. Surprisingly, she didn't giggle. She hadn't practically all night. Thinking about it, she hadn't talked very much, either. Stan was mute as well. Someone had to break the ice.

"So... Coke or Pepsi?" Stan asked casually, getting a laugh.

"Coke. Pepsi's too... ugh." Stan chuckled at the face she made.

"Same." Crickets. Silence. They both shifted around nervously in their chairs until the waitress came with their food. Now, they had a distraction.

Stan chewed. Candace chewed. He swallowed. She swallowed. They quickly glanced at one another every so often, only to look away. This date wasn't very fun. It was too... legitimate? Too... not fun. Not fun at all. What were they so nervous for? He'd seen her nude. She'd seen him cry like a baby. Both situations a hundred times more humiliating, yet...

Stan sighed. "Hey, how 'bout we skip the movies tonight and I take you home?"

Relief cascaded over each one of Candace's features like a waterfall as she agreed.

Some evening this turned out to be... Stan didn't even get a kiss goodnight.

-.--.

Stan gave it another shot the next Friday. Maybe they wouldn't be as nervous this time.

He picked her up at the apartment building. This time, Tom wasn't down there. He simply told Candace to meet Stan downstairs, where he waited patiently. They went to a different restaurant and then the movie theatre; they didn't talk about much at either place, but it was better than the week before... Still no kiss, not even on the cheek.

The "fresh start" they were both seeking seemed pretty stale. That's when Stan decided he'd much rather be friends, because being lovers was just not working out. He waited until Maxwell's business trip to New York to break it off with her, because doing it over the phone seemed too insensitive.

The other Ham-hams noticed his spooky behavior on the train and knew what was up.

-.--.

"Candace." He took her paws. "This is too weird. I have no idea why, but I think... maybe we shouldn't see each other anymore." She sniffled, hanging her head. Her bangs covered her eyes. "There's just been too many ups and downs, and I don't think my heart could take this much longer. You understand, right?" he finished tenderly. Candace tearfully nodded.

-.--.

Stan sulked in his, Hamtaro's and Oxnard's room for two days, confiding in his friends and trying not to think too hard about what had happened. The next day, all the hams boarded the train at seven thirty that evening.

Stan, Cappy, and Penelope fell asleep in their seat, only to be awoken by someone screaming outside. The train lurched a bit, beginning to start up when they realized what the hamster was saying.

"STAN!" Candace panted, running up to the loading dock by the train. It started moving. "STAN!" she yelled again, running faster. The train was about to really start now.

All the Ham-hams looked out the back window and saw her, gasping.

"Candace?" Stan was paralyzed with confusion.

"Stanley! Go!" Sandy pushed her brother towards the back. He opened the door and stepped out onto the balcony-like platform at the end of the train.

He reached far, far out and grabbed her paws, hoisting her up onto the platform as the train picked up speed. They stood there, silent. Candace saw his expecting eyes and knew she had to speak first. She had a lot of explaining to do, she figured.

"Stan... I'm-I..." she sighed. "I love you. I always have. I never stopped. Ever since the night I saw you on the sidewalk and said goodnight. I loved you all throughout the wedding, even after I ran off. I only ran away because I was a bit scared and very confused... I guess I was confused about you actually liking me back..." He nodded solemnly for her to continue. "And... those ups and downs? Every relationship has them. Only the strong ones survive them... But, if you honestly think we're too weak to... then... you made the right choice. I just wanted you to know that... that I still-"

"I love you." He leaned in and kissed her; only intending on a peck, but she hungrily grasped his lips with hers, pulling him closer.

The ham-girls had already assembled themselves by the window to witness the whole event. They cooed and gushed as Penelope and Cappy made barfing noises. They looked at the children.

"Ewww! You guys are gross ookyoo!" Penelope shrieked as Cappy made a twisted face. The older girls laughed as they looked at them,

picturing something...

"Oh no...We're out of New York..." Candace groaned, breaking from the kiss.

"I guess that means you'll just have to ride home with us, you little stowaway," Stan said, grinning. They walked inside, paw-in-paw. The girls scattered back to their seats, unnoticed.

-.--.

"Hey."

Sandy stood over Candace, whose shoulder was occupied by Stan's head. He was sound asleep.

"Hi."

"This is it, right?"

"This is what?"

"You guys are done breaking up, yeah?" Candace looked over at Stan fondly, smiling.

"I think so," she said confidently, joking. "Yeah. No more splitting up."

"Good. I hated seeing you guys so hurt. I love you too much."

"You're the best friend ever, Sandy!" Candace nearly leapt up.

"Shh...You'll wake him up," Sandy shushed, indicating her brother.

"Mmm... wah?" Stan mumbled groggily, slowly opening his green eyes.

"Nothing. Just go back to sleep, bro."

"Oh. Okay..." He snuggled his face into Candace's shoulder again, wrapping an arm around her waist.

"I guess I'll see you tonight. You are staying at the house, right?"

"Yeah. It'll be like, ten thirty when we get to PA."

"Okay. I'll see you then, Hon."

"Bye, Sandy."

-.--.

"Aren't they so cute together?" Sandy gushed to Pashmina and Bijou moments later.

Candace's eyes twitched occasionally in her slumber. She rolled away from Stan and out of his protective arms. Another nightmare of last New Years had made its way into her imagination once again. Stan unconsciously pulled her back to him. The dream continued.

It didn't matter to him that she was in pain, as long as she was his. He ignored her plea, her sobs, her now untrusting eyes... all his now.

Candace whimpered louder, gnawing her lip. She wanted to call for her mother, but Lydia couldn't help her daughter from where she was, and in real-life, her father would have come in by now and ripped William off of her, beating him senseless as she ran into the bathroom. But alas, this was just another terrible dream- a nightmare.

Stan held Candace tighter, groaning. Unlike her, he was having a _great_ dream. One that probably involved very attractive girls in small clothing. Candace fidgeted in her sleep, causing his grip to loosen, and rolled away again, only to be pulled back.

She tried prying herself out from under him, but he was way too strong. Sweat dripped from him to her, mixing in with her tears. It matted up his purple-patterned fur, which vividly resembled Hamtaro's, Candace noticed. She began thinking about the Ham-hams, then Stan. She wanted him to rescue her but, as in real-life, he had run off. Some things just don't change, in dreams or reality...

Tears formed behind Candace's closed eyes as Stan continued to faintly moan. She didn't fidget or roll away this time. She stayed still, knowing- hoping- she'd wake up and everything would be okay. That she and Stan were getting more serious after three months of official dating and that her acting career had recovered and was skyrocketing. That her father would open up more and that she could find closure in her mother's death, even though it had been fifteen years...

_William had only begun. Things started picking up, heating up and Candace became more desperate. She was __not__ about to have his child! __Never__!... And yet it seemed as though that's where things were going... She tried harder... Nothing. Even harder... Nothing. Harder still..._

Candace's eyes shot open, wide as she awoke in a cold sweat. Her nerves tingled when she felt a pair of arms around her waist. She quickly spun around to see Stan.

Stan. Stan, oh how relieved she was to see Stan! Tears flowed from her eyes as she embraced him, crying into his chest, waking him up.

"Mm?" He groggily looked down at her shadowy figure, sat up as she still clung to him and turned on his lamp, setting it on low so their eyes wouldn't sting. "Baby, what's wrong?" No answer. "Hm? C'mon, Candy, you're worrying me here."

She looked up into his eyes, so raw with concern, with her puffy pinkish ones and lay her head back down on his chest, still crying. Stan waited until it had died down before he spoke again.

"Candace...?" No response. He smiled faintly as he heard her soft, slow breathing. She had fallen asleep, listening to his heart beat. "Sleep tight, Candy..." he said gently before kissing her forehead

and flipping the lights off.

-.--.

"Do you know what today is?" Candace asked, giddily the next morning. Stan could tell from her eyes she was putting on an act.

"June fourth," Maxwell simply replied, not even looking up from the paper.

"Not you! Them!" Candace teased her cousin. "Gosh, you know-it-all!...So, what's so big about today?"

"It's exactly a month before Independence Day," Stan said bluntly, tiredly.

"No..." Candace smiled, but her eyes stayed dead.

"Um... It's like, three days after the first day of Summer?" Sandy guessed.

Candace grinned. "I can't believe you two!" Maxwell looked at her, to the twins, and back to her strangely. "You both celebrate it!..."

Hmmmm...What was Candace talking about? Did she know/remember something they didn't? Stan shrugged. Sandy shrugged. Maxwell asked

"Candace, what are you getting at?" She gasped, pointing a finger at him.

"You!" she playfully yelled, startling him. Her eyes had life again.

"Me?" Maxwell squeaked, gulping.

"You should know! You're Sandy's husband! I can't believe you don't kn-" Stan put a paw over her mouth playfully.

"Settle down, Candy. Just spit it out." After a moment, she calmed down.

"Okay... If you guys really want to know..." The other three leaned in a little more, hanging on to every word. "Two days from now... ring any bells?" It did. It did indeed.

"It's our birthday," Sandy said, happily.

"Mhm!" Candace nearly fell from the excitement. Stan caught the toppling girl.

They still didn't know why Candace had gotten so worked up about it. Stan figured she needed something to keep her mind on, so she wouldn't think about whatever she was last night.

-.--.

"Happy birthday, you..." Candace whispered first thing that morning. Her nose was pressed against Stan's, so when he opened his eyes, all

he saw was a big brown Cyclops one.

"Hey thanks, Baby..." he whispered back. They cuddled and cooed until a quiet knock on the door brought them back to Earth. "Yeah...?" Stan shakily asked as Candace giggled. "Hello?" He walked over to his door and swung it open, expecting to see his sister or Maxwell. No one. No one he saw, anyway. Candace walked over, wondering why he was standing there so long. Stan continued scoping the halls until her laughter got too distracting. "What?" She pointed down, where Starlette sat with a block in her paw. The one she used to rap on the door.

"Hey, Starry..." Candace cooed maternally as she picked the baby up. "How'd you get up here?" The baby giggled as her chin got tickled. "You're a smart one... Isn't she, Stan?" Stan had an odd look on his face, this concerned Candace. "Hm?"

"Great. Another Maxwell..." he grumbled, causing his girl-ham to laugh.

-.-.-.

"Oh my gosh!" Sandy wept as she took her baby from Candace. "Where was she?"

"Upstairs," Candace answered.

"She crawled all the way upstairs!"

"Mhm. And she was our wake-up call," Candace giggled at Stan. Sandy smiled warmly, cradling her child.

"I'm glad her auntie was there to keep her safe..." she mumbled, smiling.

"What was that Sans?" Sandy's eyes widened, realizing what she had just said. She thought fast, not wanting to openly imply any of her thoughts.

"I'm glad you guys were there to look after her! That's what I said! Honest!" Sandy blurted suspiciously.

"I wasn't sayin' anything..." Candace slowly said, nervously laughing, backing up a bit. Stan knew exactly what she had said and hoped it would be true eventually.

That's when an idea came. That's when he decided he would pop a certain question to Candace that night so he would no longer have to deal with the heartache of saying goodbye after each of her visits. That's when he decided to take the leap, to better their bond, create a more powerful relationship. He would go for it. He wouldn't chicken out, even if it was too soon...

-.-.-.

Each couple made separate dinner dates, but promised to meet back at the house at around ten for cake and presents. Sandy asked Pashmina to baby-sit, since Bijou was out, and they were off.

...Where Maxwell and Sandy are...

Sandy quietly chewed on her pasta and Maxwell kept giving her concerned glances. She didn't look up from her plate, she was so transfixed in thought.

"Darling...? Is everything alright?" Sandy finally snapped out of it and looked up.

"Hm?"

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah... It's just... What if Star needs us? We've never been away from her before." Maxwell smiled.

"She'll be fine. Pashmina's a wonderful babysitter, she's had a lot of practice with Penelope, and I can tell now that she'd make a great mother. You and I have nothing to worry about. I read in a book once that sometimes parents have a harder time with separation than their children." Sandy frowned. "I'm sure she missed us, though." He faintly smiled, taking his wife's paws. They looked into each others' eyes. "That's not all that's wrong, is it?" Sandy looked into his eyes defiantly, then sighed.

"No..."

"Can you tell me what the matter is?" She sighed again.

"I'm worried about Stan. Candace is leaving tomorrow morning, and you know how he gets..." Maxwell frowned slightly, still trying to keep the mood light.

"Don't worry. He'll be fine by the day after. He always is. So, where do you want to go next?" Sandy's eyes brightened and her smile returned as she replied.

...Where Stan and Candace are...

Candace looked up at Stan as they swayed outside to the gentle music from the building behind them. She saw a red spot on his nose from when he pulled a Lady and the Tramp at dinner earlier that evening. She laughed.

"What?" he asked. She took her thumb and wiped the spaghetti sauce from his nose and laughed harder. He joined in.

"You're such a dork."

"_Me_? Who are _you_ calling a dork? If _anyone's_ _the_ dork, it's _Max_!" They chuckled.

"Be nice..."

"Alright..." He pulled her nearer. She breathed in deeply, catching his scent.

Candace noticed Stan smelled nice. He normally did, but tonight she noticed it more than ever. She snuggled closer to him and he closer to her. She felt his beating heart on her chest and he felt hers as they continued to dance. Her pink skirt brushed against his black

pant leg.

Lub dub, lub dub, lub dub, lub dub...

The beats almost seemed in time. Candace's heart nearly stopped when he touched her lower back and Stan's nearly exploded as she nuzzled his neck. Both hams' bodies tingled with this sense of unity, of togetherness. Never before had they felt like 'us' or 'we' so strongly. Stan knew he just couldn't forget to ask her about his issue nor could he let her go.

They stared into each other's eyes and looked up into the starry sky outside of the restaurant. The sky held but a few big clouds and a warm summer drizzle fell unto the Earth. Faint rolls of thunder sounded, but Candace was not afraid. Stan would protect her. He always would. She knew it.

'This is our place...' they silently proclaimed to the other through glances and walked inside so they wouldn't get soaked. 'Our place...'

10. New Years Resolution

Disclaimer: I do not own Hamtaro, any states, whatever. I own Candace and I kinda want to own this story now...even though I'm not truly writing it. My other self- the one who likes boys and can do a lot of neat stuff- writes this. ****I **cannot write for the life of me...**

AN: (Crickets. Silence). Ugh...read to find out what Stan's question is, I guess! Oh! And, **__**REVIEW**__**(I decided to try something new! No one but my usuals will listen, but heck; it's worth a try, right?) Oh! And e24, I tried taking your advice. I hope I did it alright...that's why you're beta-ing this! XD Kadurkadur!

-OMG! I uploaded the wrong chapter! I am SO sorry, elric24! SO SORRY! Anyway, here's the RIGHT one peeps! Sorry, all!

Chapter Ten: New Years Resolution

Back at the duplex, Sandy and Maxwell sauntered in, being greeted by Stan and Candace. Pashmina walked into the joint-kitchen from upstairs with Starlette and set her in the pen, saying goodnight.

"Aww... C'mon, Pashy. Stay a little while," Stan said. She kind of missed his flirting. Not really, but kind of.

"Well, I guess..." she said faintly, smiling. They sat down at the table as Candace and Maxwell got the cake. Half-lemon and half-chocolate, because the twins could never agree.

Maxwell set it on the table as Candace snagged a lighter from the junk drawer. Slowly, she lit the double set of two and four-shaped candles. One set was glittery lavender and the other set was bright red. Maxwell and Pashmina sang the proper song as Starlette drabbled along. And Candace?

"Crappy birthday to you, the train goes choo-choo, and runs over

Stanley-Oops! That's not nice!" she teased. Stan looked up at her crossly and grinning from his spot at the table and quickly blew his candles out, plucked them off, and threw them at Candace. She dodged them and scowled playfully at him. "Hey! I wasn't _that_ mean!" Stan chuckled boisterously.

"Guys, you're like, being bad influences to the baby!" Sandy scolded.

"I think you should apologize," Pashmina said, smiling.

"To a baby?" Stan cocked an eyebrow.

"Sounds good to me!" Candace chimed, smirking at him. Maxwell stifled a laugh.

"Oh yeah? Well, if I do, _you_ have to too!"

"Fine!... Sorry, sweetheart, I was bad," she said to Starlette, lightly slapping herself, causing the baby to laugh. "Your turn." Stan took in a breath as he knelt down to Star's level.

"My apologies, small one. You see, Uncle Stan can't control himself when he's around Candace." He stood up and grabbed Candace, kissing her deeply. She slightly squealed and kissed back. He leaned her back and she pulled him closer, slightly moaning. But, before they could get anywhere-

"Get a room!" Pashmina said. They stopped, reddening a bit, and laughed.

"Sure. Where to, babe?" Stan teasingly played along.

"Holiday Inn?" Candace grinned.

"How 'bout the motel down the road? I hear they have the best roaches!"

"Yum."

"Knock it off, you two! It's almost eleven and I'm sure Pashmina would like to go home," Maxwell said, trying to settle them down. "You guys could be so childish sometimes."

Candace smiled. To think, she was afraid that she and Stan wouldn't be able to do this kind of stuff as a couple. She laughed heartily with the others.

-.--.

Stan sat on his bed, pondering how to break it to her. Once he got an idea, he didn't wait for it to fade. He ran into the bathroom down the hall where Candace was finishing up with brushing her teeth. She began washing her face when Stan barged in to the open room. She gasped when her waist was briskly embraced and turned around in his arms.

"Hey...What do ya think you're doing, buddy?" she asked playfully, kissing him gently.

"Um..." Oh. Shit. His mind went blank. He needed more time. "Nothin'. It was just a retarded joke I overheard Howdy telling," he fibbed.

"Tell me. I always love hearing what that cornball has to say!"

"Nah. I'll let him tell it to ya. I don't ruin it quite as good."

Candace giggled. "Alright. I'll see you in a few minutes, okay?" She shut the door.

Stan trudged away from the room. _'Damn. What's my problem? I gave Max perfect advice for this sort of thing and yet... Could I have forgotten it? I better not have! ... I'm just stressed. That's it, stressed. I have nothing to worry about. I'll just... simply ask her. I hope she doesn't think it's too soon...'_

-.--.

Candace crawled into Stan's bed and plopped down beside him, snuggling closer as she took her hair out of its scrunchie.

"So, big 24-year-old, what's it feel like?"

"Too early to tell, Candy." She laughed. He turned off the lights. All was dark and quiet. Only the crickets outside could be heard. Candace blushed and was thinking about earlier that night while Stan battled himself. Out of frustration, he dropped the subject. "Good night."

"Not yet."

"Heke?"

"Not yet..." Candace purred in a more seductive tone. Stan smiled. She was in that mood she was in earlier.

They cuddled closer. Kissing, Stan could feel her warmth. Were they too close? He tried moving, but Candace moved as well. Her body began overlapping his when she settled herself on his chest, wrapping her legs around his hips. Stan groaned. This was almost too much.

"I love it when you get like this," he grunted.

"Hm?"

"I wish we could be like this every night..." he trailed off. She smiled and blushed.

"Me too."

"Why don't we?" He sat up and Candace got off, sitting across from him on her knees.

"Huh?" He took her paws and nuzzled her. With his nose still on hers, he replied:

"I want you to move in with me." There. He got it out.

Candace gasped, ecstatic. "I'd love to!" But, her smile quickly faded. Harsh reality hit. "I can't." Stan frowned.

"You can't?"

"No. I can't..." she gently said.

"Oh... How come?" he wouldn't let it end without a fight.

"Stan, my whole life is in New York. I mean, I have my job, all my friends, my dad and the apartment... New York is home. It's who I am- what I'll always be..." Stan looked down. He shouldn't have asked.

"Are you saying this because you think it's too early?"

"No. It's just... I wanna be with you, Stan, but we're from two different places. I couldn't possibly ask you to move in with me... It would be unfair. Your life is here... Your sister and best friends are here... Think about the baby. Starlette would miss you. She loves her uncle and needs him around when her parents get on her nerves or when she can't talk about something with them..."

"Wanna know what else she needs?... An aunt." He took in a breath. "Candace, every day, hour, minute you're not here with me is close to unbearable. I count the days until I know I'll see you again, and when you can't make it, it's devastating. Just give me the satisfaction of saying you'll move in, Candace please, I don't know if I can do this much longer..."

"I could say it, but that would be lying." They lie down, quiet for a moment. "Stan..." She tried to touch his arm, soothingly, consolingly, but he grunted, rolling over, his back to her now.

"Good night," he gruffly said, folding his arms across his chest. Tears dribbled down Candace's cheeks as Stan held his in.

-.--.

Things were better the next morning, Candace supposed. At least Stan didn't have his back to her, but it still didn't change the tension or his averted eyes.

"Guys...?" Maxwell wasn't used to this quiet. Yes, he enjoyed being able to read the paper without noise, but not at his friends' expense. "Are you alright?"

Candace looked gloomily at her cereal. Stan glared angrily into his coffee. Maxwell tried desperately to get them to at least look up, if not talk. Sandy walked downstairs into the room with a cranky Starlette in her arms. The baby bleated madly at her mother once she was set down in her highchair. Surely, if Sandy could handle the child, she would be able to help with this situation.

"Good mor-," Sandy started off cheerfully, only to get cut off by two venomous glares. "What's with you?" She turned her head to Maxwell. "What's with them?" she mouthed to her husband, who

11. Different Kinds of Sick

Disclaimer: I do not own any thing from the show Hamtaro. (Has nothing else to say...for once.)

AN: Sorry about the last chapter, everyone! I really am! You have no idea how embarrassing that was! Well,...thank God only four people hit that one. (I checked before I deleted it, sneaky lil' thing I am! XD) Anyway, thanks, lupyne. Your review cheered me up! I only wish I had someone else's point of view for a few minutes to see my own work. But in ****my**** mind, it seems pretty amateur...I'll learn to do better, though. I always strive to do what's capable of me, and this is not it. (I'm a bit if a perfectionist...if only I was that ay with my room! XD) ANYWAY! Sorry if I'm boring you all here...read on! Thanks a million! Sorry for the over-a-month long wait! I truly am! XD At least the length will make up for itâ€¦|(sweat drops)

Chapter Eleven: Different Kinds of Sick

****_Bzzzzzz!_****

Tom stopped his pacing and froze, knowing exactly who was there. A look of dread crept upon his face as he became more heartsick. It wasn't because he didn't trust the young man there, or that he didn't believe his little girl would be happy with him, it was more likeâ€¦she was no longer his full responsibility, she was no longer fully his. This scared him in more ways than one.

"Hello, Stanley." He tried to mask his feeling of deep gloom with a cheerful tone, but it showed anyway. Stan didn't know what to think, so he didn't and replied,

"Hey, Mr. Fox!"

"Come on in."

Once in the apartment, Tom had him sit down with Sandy and Maxwell to chat a bit and relax. Stan couldn't though, he kept on moving and fidgeting.

"So, I hear you two have a baby. Candace absolutely adores her," Tom said to the young couple and quickly winked at Stan, who was smiling at his sister and didn't notice as his foot tap tapped on the cold, hardwood floor.

"Mhm. Her name is Star," Sandy informed cheerfully. Stan wiggled.

"And where is she?"

"At home, with our friend." Twitch, twitch.

"Oh." Tap, tap, tap.

"Where's Candace?" Stan questioned, bouncing his leg up and down.

"At rehearsal," Tom replied.

"When will that be done?" He asked, attempting to be casual, tapping on his legs.

"In about an hour." Slap, slap.

"Umâ€¦Mr. Fox?" Thud.

"Oh Max, just call me Tom." Thud, creak.

"Oh. Umâ€¦Tom?" Tap, tap, tap, tap. Lub dub, lub dub.

"Yes?" Teapot whistle. Fidget. Tap. Lub dub. Thud. Pop. Creak. Bang!

Stan stood up, getting strange looks from everyone.

"Where are you like, going?" Sandy asked.

"I'm gonna get Candace."

"She usually walks home alone or with a fri-"

"Bye!" Stan unintentionally cut Tom off and slammed the door.

"It's so sweet, how excited he is to see Candace and all," Maxwell said, excusing his friend.

"That's quite a brother you have there, Sandy."

"Yeah, well he has his momentsâ€¦"

"He's quite the wiggle-worm."

"Tell me about itâ€¦He can be like, so immature when it comes to waiting."

The three laughed and continued on with a normal conversation.

-.--.

Stan was walking, well running, down the halls of the large theatre building when he heard voices loudly gossiping and that famous ringing giggle he loved so much. Candace was near, and he didn't even have to use his hiffer to find her. He just followed the sounds of the women's voices.

"I just can't believe it, Candy. I mean, Doll, you'll be here for tomorrow's performance and thenâ€¦gone." Stan recognized the slightly melancholy voice as Roxanne's.

"I'll still call and visit you guys, Roxi." They weakly smiled at each other. "Plus, Stan's a wonderful guy. You have nothing to worry about."

"Well, if what your little skeptic art friends Annik and Lakin said was true about your pops' fondness of him, then it must be true!"

"So, we hear all this great stuff about him, but never once are showed a picture. How do we know you're not just making this up?" An unfamiliar voice teasingly asked.

"Because I never lie to you, that's how." Candace said in playful defense.

"Soâ€¦let's see it! What does he look like?" they slyly asked.

"Dianeâ€¦" Candace whined, embarrassed.

"C'mon, you gotta have a picture someplace!" Diane pressed as Candace reluctantly pulled one out of her wallet. The other two snatched it out of her paw and grouped around it with their backs turned to her, gushing.

It was the one of them at the wedding almost two years before, where Stan had his nose to hers and said he wanted to get a better look at her eyes, which were now sparkling in tears of embarrassment with all the fuss her friends kept making.

"What a stud-muffin! He's so adorable!" Diana yelled appreciatively.

"I could just eat him right up!" Roxanne chimed in.

"Guysâ€¦" Candace groaned, blushing.

"Well, others do say I look better in hamsterâ€¦"

"STANLEY!" Candace shouted as she leapt into his open arms. "What are you doing here? I thought you'd be at the apartment," she continued, starting to nuzzle him.

"I got too anxious and figured I could walk you home," he answered innocently, her body still in his arms and his nose still rubbed against hers. The others cooed.

"That's so sweet!" she dropped down and hugged Stan.

And with that, he took her paw and they walked away, Roxanne and Diane gushing all the while.

-.-.-.

Back at the apartment, the four young adults stood around in the living room, exiled from the kitchen because Tom said he didn't want help. Sandy and Maxwell stood by Candace and they talked until they noticed Stan was being awfully quiet over where he stood, looking up at something on the fireplace mantle. He felt their stares and turned to Candace.

"Wow, Candy! You were hot in high school!" The others sweat dropped. Candace went over to investigate what Stan was looking at. She smiled at him.

"That's not me. That's my mom."

"Oh. You look just like herâ€¦"

Candace blushed. "Thanks. A lot of hamsters say that."

"So, where is she?" Stan asked, still looking at the young lady in the picture. He noticed that Candace must have inherited her brown eyes from Tom because her mother's were a very crystal blue.

She opened her mouth to speak, but her father called from the kitchen for her to help out with the meal.

"Yes, Daddy!" she ran off as Stan noticed the look of disbelief his sister gave him.

"You mean, you don't know yet?" Sandy asked with venom in her tone.

"Don't know what?"

"That Canda-"

"Sans! We need some help in here please!"

"Sure. Be there in a sec.!" And off she went as well.

Stan turned to Maxwell, confused. "What? Is there something she knows that we don't?" His friend began to look uncomfortable.

"Maybe it would be best if you heard it from Candaceâ€|"

-.--.

Dinner was so enjoyable and everyone was having such a good time, Stan completely forgot about what happened earlier. What made things even better was that Candace started playing a little footsie with him. He only wished Sandy and Maxwell would stay with them instead of getting a hotel room, but they insisted that they didn't want to be a bother and left at around nine.

The remaining three got ready for bed and headed for their rooms. Stan walked towards the couch but Candace grabbed his arm and led him to her room. Stan gulped as he was being dragged away and gave Tom a questioning look, getting an eased, almost given-in one in return. He weakly and gratefully smiled. Tom trusted him with his daughter and Stan silently vowed to keep that trust in him by being responsible and respecting. He could only imagine how worried sick _he'd _be if a boy was going to sleep in his daughter's bed as they tumbled into Candace's.

-.--.

The next day, Stan awoke feeling a slight chill. It was the end of June, and mornings tended to be cooler, but not like this. He thought maybe it was the thermostat setting Tom liked to keep it at.

He noticed Candace wasn't next to him and figured she had already left for another rehearsal and knew she wouldn't be back until after the cast party, when they'd leave for Pennsylvania on the late-night train.

Getting up, he realized he was breathing through his mouth instead of his nose and, no matter how many tissues he used, it wouldn't come unplugged. At breakfast with Sandy and Maxwell at this little café down the street, he didn't want to eat very much. When he talked, he sounded funny and he felt achy all over.

Stan finally decided to take some medicine, which he thoroughly loathed, and went to the show, where he kept drifting in and out of sleep. He felt guilty he had slept through most of Candace's last play.

Backstage, Candace ran up to him, squealing in all the hype and excitement of her last Broadway performance as her friends screamed behind her. Stan cringed.

"Stan! Did you like it? Was it good?" Stan opened his mouth to reply, but the lingering tickle in his throat made his eyes water and he turned away from Candace so he couldn't cough on her. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. But I think I'll head over to the apartment now. I'll see you later when you get home, babe. Plus, I'm sure you don't want me loafing around while you're trying to hang with your friends." He kissed the top of her head and walked dizzily back to her home.

-.--.

Candace, Sandy, and Maxwell walked through the door at eight-thirty. They left the party early to check on Stan. Tom, who hadn't stayed for the festivities, followed him home and put him to bed as soon as they got there.

"Candace, I don't think you can leave tonight. You'll have to stay put for a day or so."

"Daddy, I know you'll miss me and, really like Stan, but you don't have to keep us locked here," Candace said, getting the wrong message.

"No, Bun. I'm happy you're spreading your wings and going to new places, and I know you'll be happy and taken care of. It's Stan though, darling," he explained, clearing the air.

"Stan? What's wrong with Stan? Is he that sick?" Sandy asked.

I'm afraid so. I can't give him any more medicine because he took some just a couple hours ago. That, and I don't know if he's allergic to anything."

"My poor baby!" Candace rushed into her room.

"You two can go home if you don't want to stay another night. I'll call you when he's feeling better," Tom offered.

"No. It's fine. We'll just call Bijou and Pashmina when we get back to the hotel. It's fine, really," Maxwell said and Sandy vigorously nodded.

"Plus, we promised to help take Candace's things home with

us."

"Well, okay. Come on by tomorrow morning for breakfast."

"Alright. Than-Q, Tom."

"Good night."

-.-.-.

"Sweetheartâ€|? Stanâ€|? Are you awake?" Candace whispered gently, her paws on his hot forehead and right cheek. Stan quietly groaned, slowly opening his heavy, moist eyes. He looked up at her in a daze as she lay down next to him. "Hey youâ€|You okay?"

"Mmâ€|" he shivered up against her. Se wrapped her arms around him in an attempt to warm him up. "I'm s-so c-coldâ€|" he chattered.

"I know you are, Hon. I can't put any more blankets on you because you might overheat. Just try to sleep, okay?"

"Mmâ€|"

'Poor guyâ€|he's so miserableâ€|' "Stan? Are you able to take Motrin? You're not allergic, are you?" Stan slowly shook his head. "I'm going to leave for a few minutes, alright? I'll be right back."

Stan curled up into even more of a ball and nearly froze until Candace returned with a small cup of orangey liquid and a half-glass of water. Then she propped his head up and made him gulp down the liquids. Resting beside him again, the two cuddled- Stan under five blankets and Candace laying on top of them all.

-.-.-.

At ten o' clock, Tom walked into the room quietly. Candace read a book as Stan, who was all snuggled up by her, snored into her ear.

"He's actually asleep?"

"Mhm. Yep." Her father looked at her softly, shaking his head.

"How do you do it?" He smiled. She beamed back.

"Good night, Daddy."

"Good night, sweetheartâ€|And good luck!" They laughed as he shut off the lights.

-.-.-.

Candace checked up on Stan as soon as she woke up. He was still sleeping, so she cautiously put her paws to his face again. She smiled at him, kissed his cheek, and walked into the kitchen, tripping over the blankets Stan had pushed off in his sleep.

"Hey. Good morning," Sandy said.

"Hi."

"How is he?"

"Cool as a cucumber! His fever must have broke sometime last night."

"That's good," Maxwell said.

"Sit down, Bun," Tom said, pulling out a chair for her. She sat.

"Even better," Her eyes lit up. "We may be able to leave today!"

The other two beamed and Tom just barely smiled. Candace noticed this and took his paw, smiling sympathetically at her father. It was amazing how much she was like her mother. He sighed, defeated. His little girl had grown up, but he now realized that she would always be his no matter whatâ€|

12. The Diary of Candace Fox

Disclaimer: I do not own any thing from the show Hamtaro. (Has nothing else to say...again...XD)

Author's Note: Yeah...um...I'll probably be able to say something later. Sorry about being soâ€|uneventful there (and here) umâ€|yeah. I just couldn't start off that last chapter with them already living together and getting ya'll confusedâ€|("Connect-the-plot"â€|) I guess I did have something to say after all! XD

Chapter Twelve: The Diary of Candace Fox

"I love you," Candace said and pecked Stan on the lips.

"Love ya too, babe," he replied. "You girls have fun."

"Bye, Stanley," Sandy said and hugged her twin. The two women darted off.

Stan sighed, smiling and continued to unpack the rest of Candace's things, even though she told him not to-that she'd do it once she and Sandy returned from their weekend retreat with the teen youth group Sandy helped out with at her church. He wanted to surprise her, make up for being so pressuring before, and thank her for all she'd done that past weekend.

He attempted shredding off some of the translucent tape on one of the other boxes. He pulled harder until it was three inches up and then used his teeth to get it the rest of the way.

'Finally,' he sighed and opened the flaps.

Tons of books were stacked up neatly. None of them had titles and all had plain blank covers, Stan realized as he pulled them out one by one. All he noticed on them were little numbers in their corners. He restacked them on the floor in order.

'Hmmmmmmâ€|' Stan opened up the first one. Childish chicken scratch and drawings decorated the pages as he flipped through the book,

glancing for only a mere second or two per page. 'This must be hers from grade school.' A grin crept upon his face as he took the book and the sixteen others and plopped down on their bed.

He situated himself comfortably and cracked the book open again. 'I'm sure she won't mind me reading this. None of this stuff is really important to her anymore anyway.' And so he started.

Setebur 27, 1989

I'm Candace Michelle Fox. I am six and I like to play dress-up and house. My frind Will and me play Jedi Waryers and no one usaly wins. We like to tie. (Insert smiley face here.) Your not a reglur diary, ya no? When mom and dad went to a sicoligust and talked with him, he sed he wanted me to rite about my fellings. He's nice. He told me to start riteing on my birt dai so I can keep trak of time bedderâ€|

And on with the pointless introduction drabble Stan could barely make out. He continued for a while longer.

May 7, 1989

Dere Diary,

Last nite, mom threw a glass at dad. It mised him and almost hit me! I thot their fiteing was geting bedder. I hope it dose. Dad sed he mite send mom away if she acts like this, but I wont let him. She don't desserv itâ€|

June 9, 1989

Today, my folks tuk me to Central Park. We had fun. I met this girl named Kendra. She's home-skooled by her mom becus she's sick. I'm going to make her a get-well card tonite and mom's going to give it to her wen she goes to the store. I hope she feels bedder sune. I want to play with her agin. Today was also good becus mom and dad had fun too and did not fite one time!

He finished the first one, which ended on the 26th of September, and began the next and then went on to the third.

9/27/_91_

Today, at skool, Will got kissed by Debby Warshire, andâ€|he LIKED IT! EWW! (Insert barfing face here.)â€|

Stan chuckled and kept on reading.

â€|_I don't care what eneyone says, I'm NEVER kissing boys! GROSS!â€|_

He laughed and rolled his eyes at this statement, knowing about the taboo of boys and girls in grade school but thought, 'Oh really, Candaceâ€|?' anyway, still chuckling away.

â€|_Eneyway, today went pretty good. Mom wasn't asleep when I got home and she was smiling. SMILING, diary! Maybe she's getting better. Maybe she'll always be happy like this and not sad eneymoreâ€|I really hope she stays this way. I think this is the real her. I want

to know this momâ€¦|_

10/31/91

I went Trick-or-Treating with Kendra and our moms tonight! We had SOOOOOO MUCH fun! I went as Marylyn Monroe, because she's cool! Heehee. Kendra was a football player. She wanted to cuvor up her head with sumthing so hamsters wouldn't see it. She got better since this summer, but she's still bald. Mom said it was from the treatments at the hospiddle. Sunday, she will have her hair back and we can brade it a zillion times over and she will be butyful! I can't wait!

11/2/91

They fot. And fot and fot last nightâ€¦Dad was yelling. Mom was yelling. I cried, but they didn't hear. I didn't want them to. They can be so dum sumtimes, I swearâ€¦They'll be O-K agin soon, I think. They just have to apologizeâ€¦I'll keep praying for them, even tho it hasn't been working so good. It will. Mom says if you keep on praying for sumthing, it will come. That is how she exaped her house back in Vergina by having me. She prayed. She dosent eneymore, but I think if she did, she would be happy agin.

11/18/91

Mom's gone. I hope she's happy. I don't care. I don't. I really, really don't. Wellâ€¦I guess I doâ€¦I don't know. I wish I knew what was going onâ€¦ She left us last night, that's all I know. That, and she's not ever coming back. Never. She went to place that I hear is wonderful and that I will go there if I'm really good when I'm older. Much older, old ladies at church tell me, because they don't want me to go at mom's age. She was only 25. 25 is not old. Not one bit, they tell me. I always thot it wasâ€¦Dad told me mom died last night in an accident that he was called out to. He didn't know. If he had, I bet he would have cried and not gone. Let the deputies deal with it, but he did. He didn't know, my poor daddyâ€¦ She was found all crunched up in a ball in the front seat, so tiny, tiny small. The car was totaled and the man who did it didn't even get a scratch! He said he was sorry and my dad hit him. Iâ€¦don't get itâ€¦I'm soâ€¦confused. I don't know what I'll do without her, diaryâ€¦I want to be dead with her so she's not aloneâ€¦|

Stan slammed the diary shut. So that's why he never met a Mrs. Fox! There was none presently. His heart ached terribly in sympathy. How had he not known this very important bit of his lover's life? She didn't act motherless. Did Maxwell even know? He had to. This disturbed Stan only momentarily for he wanted to read more, to learn about all the other things she wasn't telling them-verbally or bodily. He opened it up to the next entry.

Jan. 22, 1992

The doc wants me to write more now since mom's dead. Sorry I haven't written in a whileâ€¦|

And on and on he read. About little crushes which were stated as "one true loves", arguments with friends and Tom, and plays- at school and on Broadway. He finally got to the one where she was beginning junior high. The fun was only about to beginâ€¦|

Stan nearly choked he cracked so much up with one of her few lazy entries she'd put in and rolled off the bed, to the floor. It was addressed to "the shrink", as she affectionately called him more often in her older elementary days.

March 4, 1995

Hey, Doc.,

I feel likeâ€|you should take this journal and shove it up your stiff little ass. I'm so sick of writing for you! -Love CF

That was Candace for you, always good for a laugh with her abrupt firecracker retorts.

_May 12, 1995 _

Kendra's back in the hospital. She has Leukemia again. She's had it for as long as I've known her. It's been worse, she says and I believe her. She'll tough it out, she's strong like that. I think she'll be better come next autumn. Other than that, I have nothing else to talk about today. I don't like to stay sad about things that I have no right being sad about. Yeah, Ken's one of my best friends, but I know she'll get better quickly. What's the point of worrying so much? Her mom does enough of that.

Dec. 6, 1995

Me and dad went to the Policemen's Ball. It was great! He let Roxanne pick out a dress with me even though we all know she has a very weird fashion sense. She wanted me to pick this one that, no lie, looked like a chubby Christmas tree! I finally settled on a nice sparkly one. It has a bit of an orange tint and is mainly silver and I really like it. Everyone there complimented me and said I looked just like mom. I felt the most sad when dad overheard somebody telling me that. Usually, he took her to this party and they left me at home with Mrs. Rosalini and we'd play cards all night long until they got back. I'd honestly do anything to relive that time. ANYTHING.

Feb. 14, 1996

Everyone has a Valentine except meâ€|(cries) I don't really mind, though because Will said he'd be mine AND Cheryl Dennison's. I told him not to bother. (I'm too young for love anywayâ€|)

Apr. 11, 1996

Kenny's being transferred to the clinic in Texas and her family is moving there so they won't have to keep traveling back. Apparently, the cancer is worse than they thought and the hospital she's in now doesn't have the right treatments or equipment to help her, so that's why they have to go. All of her friends are having a goodbye/ good luck party for her in her room tomorrow because she leaves Tuesday. I'm really gonna miss herâ€|

Jun. 7, 1996

_We had four tests today. All very long. I'm fried. The end. Tomorrow

is eighth grade graduation and I never have to see my stupid vice principal again! Yay! I can't wait to be in the bigger school!_

And from little, cozy middle school on to big, frightening high schoolâ€|

Aug. 19, 1998

Tomorrow, I start back at school, not as a stupid little Freshman, but as a more experienced Sophomore. As a Sophomore, I promise to help all the little new kids out with schedules and lockers and All That Jazz. (Haha. That's the show we're doing in Winter!) Anyway, now Will will be in my school and I have to protect him from getting beaten up. (He tends to run his big mouth off at hamsters sometimes. He's always been like that, but I still love the Hell outta him.)

Oct. 2, 1998

_For some odd reason, this new girl says all of us New York chicks are whores. She and her clique are from the country and wouldn't get us, but that's not why I'm pissed off. I'm mad because she's the reason no one asked me to Homecoming. Hamsters who've known me since pre-K and elementary school now question everything they thought they knew about me, they really think I sleep around! Me and me alone! There are plenty of girls who really do, and no one gives them shit at all! I can't believe it! Grrrâ€|(Insert mad face.) But Will was such a sweetie. He took me and we had a super time! It didn't matter that I was older and he was a Freshman or that everyone kept snickering at us, we didn't care really, it was just such a good night! He's such a __**great **__friend. I'm so glad I know him. He must've had a good time too because he smiled the whole time._

Stan scoffed. 'More like grinnedâ€| The little dickâ€|'

He never thought anyone would not like Candace. She seemed to be a very likable and charismatic girl. He remembered when his sister had fallen victim to that sort of treatment in eighth grade until whoever they were moved again. He remembered how she'd cry all night because her friends were becoming less and others wouldn't make eye-contact with her. He'd try to make it better, but even big brothers aren't Superman and can fix everything. Eventually, in high school, Sandy made more friends, better friends, and he suspected Candace had done the same in college.

He got to her journals of college at around the time Maxwell said he was going to bed and that he wanted to know what Stan had been doing up there all day. Stan looked over at the clock and gasped. It was nearly midnight. He began to unpack at one or two, when the girls left for church camp. He didn't reply and Maxwell was obviously too tired to really care because he didn't go up and hound him like he usually did.

After a moment, Stan began to read about Candace's college years. He grinned sheepishly before reading the first entry. 'This is where all the fun isâ€|' He had almost finished the first book and was a little disappointed. There was no such "action" he had been looking forward to-I mean intending throughout the whole thing so far. Every entry was spotless- funny, but clean nonetheless. 'Awwâ€| C'mon, don't tell me I'm dating a prude!' He opened up to the next entry.

July 5, 2000

Dad really knows how to ruin a good fourth of Julyâ€¦He promised me this May, a few weeks before graduation, that he'd take me to the campus and help me unpack. We would stay in my dorm room for the whole weekend and just kind of hang out. We never get to do that anymore. He says he can't take me because he "forgot", that he switched shifts with the other Sergeant because "his wife could have the baby at any moment now." That's great, really great, and I don't want to be selfish, but I was really, truly, looking forward to this for almost the whole summerâ€¦The reason I'm leaving so early is because I want to get out of here. I'll be living close to some professors so I stay out of trouble. Haha. Me? Trouble? No way! Now, I'm taking the road trip with Will and Roxanne and we're going to make a detour to Austin, Texas to visit Kendra in the hospital. (Even though I'm just going to NYU now instead of Kansas Tech. (I was transferred)â€¦heehee)) It'll be fun, right? I can have fun without my dad. It will beâ€¦my first college experience! Yeah, that's what it'll be! A whole weekend of fun, friends, and well, we'll just have find outâ€¦(wink, wink)

'Atta girl!,' Stan cheered mentally, satisfied at seeing some sort of erotic behavior in her writing.

August 25, 2000

I met a girl at art club last week. Her name's Lakin. She's such a flirty goofball, always slipping on her own drool when she chases some guy. She's very smart, too. Not a ditz. Even if she was one, I'd still be her friend. She wants to move to New York permanently and says she wants to be an art teacher at an elementary or middle school. I think she'd enjoy that. She seems like a hamster that would be good with children. It's a good goal. I have no idea what I'm going to do after my acting career ends. I'm not good at very much when it comes to jobsâ€¦Maybe a mailman or garbage collectorâ€¦? (Insert spitting smiley face here.)

November 1, 2000

_Last night, some kids thought it would be fun to TP the school and dorms. Sadly, they were all caught and punished. Even sadder, I was one of themâ€¦But, it was really fun! I didn't do much like Lakin, I just kind of stood around and handed rolls to hamsters and ran around a bit, screaming. That's why I didn't get very much punishment. I'm only suspended for a day. A lot of hamsters are suspended for a week or two and a few are even expelled for egging a professor's house and car. Damn, that was a good night! _

November 9, 2000

UGH. Exam weekâ€¦ Sorry, gotta cram 'cuz I didn't have the common sense to study. See ya. Wish me luck. Believe me, it would help a lot!

December 3, 2000

_I can't wait until Christmas Break! I need something to take my mind off of what happened. I didn't write all last week because Kendra died. I was so mad. We promised each other that I would get straight

A's and be valedictorian if she hung on and got better. We had a deal! I don't knowâ€¦ It just seems so weird. I mean, I just talked to her on the phone at Thanksgiving and now she's gone. I remember when we visited her a few months ago. She was looking so much better. Her hair was growing back and she wasn't as pale as before. Sure, we cried a whole lot, but we were just so happy to see each other. The funeral was last Friday. I didn't go. Will called me chicken shit because I'm always running away from all of this. He said I was stupid and a horrible friend, and I had to agree with him. I __**was**__ a horrible friend. I was a horrible daughter too. When mom died, I ran away from her funeral. I gave my high heels to Roxanne to hold and ran. I didn't stop until I heard sweet music coming from this big building. The door was opened, so I walked in and a man asked me if I was lost. The lady on stage smiled warmly, giggling and winked at me before I left. That's when I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be on that stage. That building was the Broadway Theatre. That day was the one when I had my first glimpse of destiny. It wasn't until three years later that it finally became my second home, but that place has always had a special place in my heart. It always will._

Stan's warm feeling he got from reading this remained as he read on for a while longer but it disappeared as he saw an entry from close to the end of the journal. Chills ran up his spine at the date of it. He thought _he_ was scared when September eleventh happened. He didn't live in New York City. His state wasn't even a neighbor. Candace, on the other paw, did. Not just in the state, but her old home was only a maximum of twenty-five blocks away from the scene. He didn't want to read on, but did anyway, out of both wanting to know and needing to as well. He braced himself for the worst.

September 12, 2001

_I always thought the World Trade Center was invincible, like it couldn't be harmed, until yesterday. It was the same way with my dad. I can't believe I almost lost him too! The New York skyline seems so naked without those buildings. Sure, we still have Sears Tower, but what use is that when so many are probably dead? When the second plane hit early that day, I thought they had just replayed the horrific scene, to be sick like the news always is, but no. Another one hit. That's when my cell phone rang and Will told me to go home, which is what I was already about to do because my boss at my off-campus job got a call saying that our building had to evacuate. We were that closeâ€¦ I was scared for nothing. I feel so selfish because dad was the reason I had to be scared for. I didn't realize that he was out there until I got home. I remember freezing as I watched the TV for a few moments, realizing that he was most likely out at the site and ran. Stupid, I know, but I ran anyway, all the way up to just a mere four hundred feet away from the still erect towers. Deputy Buckingham ran up to me, picked me up and swung me over his shoulder, running as I kicked at him frantically, yelling that he was f'ed up and that my dad was in there and I needed to get him out. He stopped running once I slipped out of his grasp and chased me as I ran back to the building. That's when the first tower fell. He pushed me behind someone's abandoned taxi as the rolling cloud of dust came our way. We barely got anything, but I felt the heat of the burnt materials as it blew at us. That's when I went hysterical. Buckingham was freaked out too. That was the tower his and dad's department was in. I screamed at him as he ran away into the murky abyss and my dirt-covered self was dragged off by someone I

didn't recognize until we got to my home. Will was there, like he always was and he took care of me. I was so numb, so sickenedâ€¦He could be a real dick sometimes, but he is also very sweet, like last night. I like it when he's like that. Roxanne came over not too long after we got there and she took me into the bathroom and forced me into the shower, where I cried and she was the one listening for once. We all snuggled together on my couch for the whole afternoon and stayed like that, quietly listening to the sirens of the ambulances, fire trucks, and squad cars from all the nearby states. They stayed with me that whole night as we watched the news for some sort of sign that my father still existed and let me cry all I wanted to. They finally coaxed me to sleep at ten and I didn't wake up until four the next morning when they got off the couch and were speaking to somebody in weepy voices. That's when I recognized it as dad's. I jolted up and hugged him as hard as I could. He wheezed a lot from all the smoke, ash, and dirt he had been buried in and ached all over from being fallen on by the enormous structure, but he is still here and I thanked God a billion times for sparing him like thatâ€¦|_

-.-.-.

"Hey!" Stan embraced Candace and Sandy upon their arrival at the duplex.

"Mummmmm mumm mum!" Little Starlette toddled to her mother, arms raised to be picked up.

"Hi, Sweetie!"

"Mummmmmmmâ€¦| "

"Awwâ€¦| "

"Hey you," Sandy said to Maxwell, leaving her brother for him with the baby. "She started talking?"â€¦|

"Candy, I kinda have to talk with you for a bit. Come upstairs with me."

"Oâ€¦|kayâ€¦| Sure."

Once up in their room, Candace looked around, wide-eyed. Everything had been neatly put away in a new spot and it no longer looked like just a guy's room. It was shared now and had both masculine and feminine attributes, as it should. She looked at Stan crossly.

"I thought I told you not to touch anythingâ€¦|" she said playfully. He didn't go along this time and was looking at something on the bed solemnly.

"Why didn't you tell me any of this stuff, Candace?"

"What?" She saw the pile of books on their bed, the only messy thing in the room. "Oh. Those. ... I dunno. Was I supposed to?"

"Candace, none of that came up in conversation. We never really did talk about-"

"Why'd you even read them?" She asked it in such a monotonous voice,

Stan couldn't tell whether she was angry or something else.

"At first, I just thought it would be for laughs. Then I read about your mom dying andâ€¦ I just wanted to find out what else you were keeping from me."

"I wasn't keeping anything from you. Not on purpose, at least."

"Why didn't you tell me your mom was dead? Why do you act like you don't even care about it?"

"What?" Candace asked in disbelief, her mouth hung open. "I care about what happened to her! I care a whole shit load, Stan! Why are you doing this?"

He noticed she was getting mad at him now. That was the last thing he wanted. He noticed that he was getting a bit fired up as well and took in a deep breath to calm down.

"Candace, I- I only wish I'd known why I read all of thatâ€¦ I'm sorry, I won't do anything like that again." Great. Now he was backing down. She probably thought he was a push-over.

"I don't care about you reading my diaries, Stan. I just don't like that you'd actually think I don't care about my momâ€¦"

"Most hamsters would still act sad about it. I just thought-"

"You thought wrong. I'm not like others. You should know that by now." Her tone had softened as she put her face to his. "And the reason I don't 'act sad' is because I don't like to dwell on the sad stuff."

He stayed quiet for a moment, staring at her as she did to him. What do you say after that? Nothing.

"Guys! Come down, quick! Star just said her middle name!" Sandy shouted gleefully up the stairs. Candace headed towards the door as Stan stood there, still in silence.

"Aren't you coming?" He shook his head. "Why not?"

"She's been trying to talk all weekend. It's nothing' new to meâ€¦"

"Oh." She walked forward some more but stopped short. "Ya wanna know what?â€¦ I think my mom would have really loved youâ€¦" And with that, she was gone.

Stan stacked the books up in no particular order and plopped them in the bottom droor of his bureau, the one that sticked and was hard to open, promising to never open the damned little things again and just let them collect dust. All the information he would ever need again would come from the place he should have gone to from the start- Candace Fox.

13. Happy Thanksgiving

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro. (Has nothing

else to say...for the third time.)

Author's Note: FINALLY! It's back up! I was gonna update three, four days ago, but...well, you all know what happened there...SilverAngel, that was so sweet! I appreciate you doing your catch-up reading! AND on Thanksgiving! Oh Gosh! I, being the terrible person I tend to be, would have just dropped it and forgot all about it if I fell behind! XD I hope it wasn't TOO much! Thanks so much! (huggles) And lupyne, thanks SO VERY MUCH for your reviews! I was beginning to think I annoyed everyone away with this Mary Sue stuff! XD Anyway, again, sorry the previous chapters were...long? Sort of uneventful, weird and whatnot... etc. Bear with me here. Sorry! I really am! XD This one is very short compared to my last two. This one is the most eye-torturing! XD (I think I do XD too much...LOL! I'll do a count for this and the first story to see how many times I used it, k?)

Chapter Thirteen: Happy Thanksgiving

'Twas the day of Thanksgiving, and all through the 'plex, the creatures were stirring, avoiding all hex. Maxwell looked at his wife, adoringly so, and she smiled back, as she stood at the stove. All was quiet in there, but the baby's cooing, and the TV blared, in the background-crowd booing. A football game on, for a few minutes more, to be switched off to another, channel three or maybe four. 'Twas the day of Thanksgiving, but also something else, a day of nostalgia, homesickness, and-

Beeeeep! Beeeeep! Beeeeeeep! The smoke alarm went off, causing Starlette to cry and the adults to cover up their ears as Sandy opened the oven and smoke poured out, and Maxwell opened up all the windows to air out the place.

"Ya know what that is, sis?" Stan yelled over the beeping.

"Duh! A smoke detector!"

"Yeah! So stop using it as a timer!" he joked, getting burnt with a flaming roll Sandy threw at him. The noise finally stopped.

"I better go settle the baby down," Sandy said.

"Good idea- Wait. She isn't crying anymore," Maxwell pointed out, stunned.

"But where is she? She's not in her highchair anymoreâ€¦!"

Stan turned off the television and the three listened closely, picking up something coming from Sandy and Maxwell's living room. They followed it.

Candace rocked Starlette, whose whimpering was fading off as she was being lulled to sleep with her faint humming. Her brunette ham-hair was loosely tied back and the front strands tickled the baby's face as she tried reaching for them. Candace laughed and Starlette batted at her fur as Stan walked over and snaked his arm around her, looking admiringly at the baby as if she were their own.

Their ownâ€¦How he would love to be a parent with Candace. She would make a good one. He, on the other paw, didn't know if he'd be any

good as a father, but he would at least try. Maybe Candace's good parenting skills would rub off on him. Stan realized what he was still doing and snapped back, looking at Candace instead of his niece as Sandy and Maxwell watched in stupor. Candace left Stan and lay the sleeping Starlette down in her pen, going back to her boy-ham. She saw her friends' confused looks and gave a questioning one back.

"What?"

"I-it's justâ€¦" Sandy looked slightly embarrassed. "It usually takes me like, almost an hour to get her to like, fall asleep. You only did it in a few minutes and that'sâ€¦it's totally cool, Candy!"

"Thanks," she said timidly, blushing. They walked back to the kitchen.

As Sandy and Maxwell cleaned up and got out new rolls, Stan and Candace sat on the sofa in their part of the house. Stan flipped to channel three. The Today Show was still on to Candace's subtle relief. She didn't know how she would handle not really being there for the parade. She and her father had always gone, and when her mother was around, they'd all go with Will and his mother.

"I guess it's a good thing they broadcast the parade, huh?"

"Yeah. Especially for hamsters like you," Stan replied, giving her cheek a kiss. It was quiet again. "Ya know, Candy?" she turned to him. "You'd make a great mom."

"Don't get any ideas, Stanâ€¦"

"No. I mean it. You'd really make a super mom."

"_Super_? What are you, gay? Is there some dude you're cheating on me for that I should know about?" Candace joked. Stan pursed his lips.

"Ya know, iths very hurthful when you jump the gun like that, sweetie. I mean, juth becauth I own a murth and have loth of pothters of hot, half-naked men on my wallth-

"Stop! Stop! Oh, the humanity!" Candace fell over. "Great! I'm in love with a flamer! Ah hahahahaha! â€¦So, what's a murth?"

"A man purth." She exploded into fits of laughter once more.

-.--.

The turkey roasted slowly, the potatoes were on the stove, and the rolls were set out to cool. Nothing else needed to be done at the moment, so Sandy and Maxwell joined the other two on their couch. The parade was just starting as they sat down.

Candace's eyes twinkled at the sites of those familiar streets and landmarks which she used to romp around by with the other local children. She sniffled quietly. As the broadcast commenced, she became more and more emotional untilâ€¦

"Wahaaaaaaa!" The others turned in her direction as Candace boisterously sobbed.

"Oh, Candyâ€|" Sandy soothed, walking over to her and giving a hug as Maxwell, who was too far away, looked on in sympathy. Stan grabbed both of her paws and held them tight, trying to console the crying Ham. She flung into his arms and cried harder as Sandy stroked her hair and patted her back, feeling sorry.

"Shhâ€|You're okayâ€|It's alright."

"I want to go homeâ€|" she croaked in his ear.

"I know. And you will. We'll go visit your dad at Christmas, alright?" She faintly smiled and nodded, sniffing for the rest of the show.

Stan wasn't only going to take her for visitation, he needed to do something in New York as well. He knew it would involve a lot of guts, Tom's faith in his love for his daughter, and of course, a blessing. What a better time to ask, other than the holidays? He knew, or at least hoped, Tom would do his part in Stan's plan, but he doing the part he had for himself was highly questionable.

At the table, during prayer before eating, he thanked God for giving him such a wonderful family- little sister, best friend/brother-in-law, baby niece and lovely girl-ham, and asked him for the bravery and strength it would take to carry out his part in asking Tom for his permission, and her pawâ€|

14. Untitled

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro.
Yeah...

Author's Note: This chapter is very very short compared to a lot of the others, because I didn't feel like rambling on about nothing and not getting to any point (Which will come in the next chapter. I hope to update tomorrow or later tonight.) Anyway, thanks again, SilverAngel 223. I feel all warm and fuzzy when I get reviews, I don't get a lot of reviewers. Heck even flames would be nice! XD (Heh. Not like I'm giving you permission, thoughâ€|) OH YEAH! I've use XD 5 times in Wedding Bells, 16- well, 17 now in this one, and I think, 3 in Salute Your Shorts! Well, that's all I have to say about that.(Go Forrest Gump!)

Chapter Fourteen: Untitled

Dazzling, Stan's brilliant green eyes stared into Candace's as her soft, shimmering ones gazed back into his. They were in yet another trance, lovingly looking upon each others' faces, touching one another like the falling velvety petals from a tulip tree in July. They felt warmth with each others' presence on this frigid and dreary late-December day. He snuggled closer, leaning into her delicate form as she fell onto her back. He stroked her silky hair and she caressed his soft warm cheeks, playing with his glistening whiskers a little. Their lips met tenderly, ever so softly touching. Candace let out a small moan as they smiled at one another, deepening the kiss and

nuzzling. Farther and farther they went into their little world until someone cleared their throat loudly, in an attempt to get their attention. The young couple snapped out of it and saw Tom standing in the doorway, leaning on the doorframe with a poker face on. They shot up.

"Oh. Hey, Daddy!" Candace cheerfully, nervously exclaimed while blushing.

"Hello, Darling, _Stan_â€|" Tom had a poker voice too.

He nervously chuckled. "Ugh, hello, Sir."

The older man turned around, leaving the room. But before actually walking away, Stan saw him slightly turn his head and smile at him. His visible dark brown eye twinkled. Stan smiled back just as he turned the corner to the kitchen.

"Does he normally do that when he catches you kissing boys?"

"No. Usually, he beats them up. That's why I never got past second base." She winked, playfully. Stan laughed, shaking his head.

"What makes _me_ so special, though?"

"He likes you," Candace replied, snuggling closer and giving him a kiss. They smiled.

-.--.

"So, are we ready?" Tom asked at noon. He was all dressed to go outside, but it looked more like he was prepared to go on an Everest expedition, his parka was so fat and puffy and his boots were so big and high.

"Ready for what?"

"You and Daddy are going to Central Park just to hang out for a while."

"We are?" Candace giggled.

"Don't be so nervous! You two need to bond and get to know each other better. It'll be really fun."

"Oh. Sure! Okay!"

"I'll see you when you get back," Candace said, pecking him. Stan jolted away.

"You mean, you're not coming?"

"Nope. It's just the two of you- you know, man to man."

"Alrightâ€|"

"Don't worry, Stanley. I might have a tazer, but legally, I can't use it unless you assault me first." Tom chuckled. Stan gulped, his eyes bulging.

"Uhâ€¦| heh hehâ€¦| Please be kidding."

Tom roared out his laughter and clapped Stan hard on the back. "Boy, you're really something, ya know that?" Stan coughed. "You okay there, buddy?"

"Yeahâ€¦|" Stan wheezed, high pitched. "Just got the wind knocked out of me, that's all."

15. Our Day Out

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro.
Yeah...Again...

Author's Note: Yeah...um...sorry about the slowness of plot moving-ness...heehee. Well, kiddies, (lupyne) if you stop saying things that I take as asking 'are we there yet?' ,we may get there faster and I won't have to stop the car and go straight home. Haha. Joking, L! XD Everyone, I feel bitey today, so forgive my sarcasm...(won't say anything else for fear of getting brutally murdered and/ or flamed.) Oh! And nothing TOO bad is going to happen. But, I won't ruin it for ya'll! (lupyne, stop trying to be a psychic! GARRRRR!) Shutting up now! XD

Chapter Fifteen: Our Day Out

Stan stood at the top of the hill as Tom made his way up to join him. The brisk wind chilled the two as Stan adjusted his foot straps on the snowboard and Tom struggled with his skis. Stan slid down to help him by taking a pole and a ski to lighten his load and they climbed up together.

"So," Tom said. "How are things at the house?"

"Fine," Stan answered, pulling the goggles down from his forehead.

"That's good. How are Sandy and Max?"

"They're doing good."

"And the baby?"

"She'll be a year old in less than two months."

"Really? That's great! Do you know if they plan on having any more little ones?"

"Dunno, but Sandy keeps talking about it." His board lifted up a cloud of powdery snow.

"Watch it!" Tom teased as the sparkly flakes fell back down.

"Sorry!" They chuckled.

"So, how are things with you and Candace? She's not as homesick, I hear."

"Yeah. Things are great!â€| Especially in the sackâ€|" Tom looked horrified.

"I really hope you're jokingâ€|"

"I am! I am! Don't worry, Sir. I would never do anything like that with her. Not unless we're married."

"That's very good of you. I only wish I had been abstinentâ€|"

"What do you mean?"

"Lydia and Iâ€| We conceived Candace out of wedlock."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"I never knewâ€|"

"Well, it was a long time ago. I didn't think back then." It was quiet until they reached the hill's top.

"Were you mad at them?"

"Who?"

"Candace and her mom."

"No! Of course not! I was a bit frustrated with Lydia for not telling me she was only in high school and for thinking the baby wasn't ours- that she had had her with this Russian boy, Max's uncle or some sort of relative I think- after we decided to see other hamsters, but I never got mad at her for having my daughter or at Candace for being born."

"Lydia was only in high school? How old were you?"

"Old enough to get arrested for doing what I did."

"Ohâ€|" Stan looked down when a gust of wind came. The breeze went over the top of the hill, creating a tiny snow storm below them.

"To answer you, Stanley, I was almost thirty, twenty-eight, I think and Lydia was just turning seventeen when we first slept together. She gave birth to Candace just before turning eighteen." It was quiet again. "Candace never told you any of this?"

"No. Maybe my sister, though. I'm not sure. She told me she doesn't like to dwell on things like that and that's why I never knew that Will used to actually be a decent guy or that her mother had died."

Tom cringed. "It's funny you bring those upâ€|"

"Hm?"

"My wife dying and William being my little girl's friend. I never expected the boy to do that to her. You can't blame him in a way,

though. The kid grew up without a father- bastard walked out on his family when Will was only a year oldâ€¦ But, that still doesn't justify how he treated Candace. You're special, Stan, you realize that? You know how to do that right." More hamsters came and started going down the hill. Stan itched to get moving, but talking with Tom was far more important at the moment.

"What right?"

"Treating my daughter well."

"Well, she deserves it."

"You're a good kid. If only you could have been born a generation earlier. We coulda been best friends and I wouldn't have treated Lydia so badly."

"I'm sure you treated her fine. She was just sadâ€¦ Maybe it ran in the family."

"No, Stanley. No man should ever tell his wife she'll be sent away for doing something to him that he probably deserved or never give her the attention she needs. Hell, I've probably only told her 'I love you' a pawful of times. That's no way to treat a womanâ€¦ You are special, boy. You know what my daughter needs and provide it for her. That's what I've always looked for in young men for her. You pass far beyond my expectations."

Stan flushed slightly. "Sirâ€¦ I just do what I feel is rightâ€¦"

"You think with your heart in the right place. I only thought with my brainâ€¦ Stan, do you love her?"

"Yes, Sir," Stan answered with a big smile.

"Do you tell her that?"

"Yes, Sir. All the time."

"How long will you love my daughter?" Tom continued surveying.

Stan didn't even have to think. "_Forever and a day_." Tom smiled at him and put an arm around his shoulder.

"Good. Then I _know_ you'll treat her right."

"Why do you say that?"

"â€¦ I never told Lydia how much I truly loved her."

"She probably knew."

"You're a good kid, Stan. I trust you."

"Do you trust me enough to let me marry her?" Stan blurted, not completely realizing what he'd said as Tom let out a shout, embracing him.

"I knew this was coming! Yes, my boy, yes! I've been waiting for this

for so long!"

Stan coughed, backing up a bit from the force of Tom's bear-hug and stepped off the hill. The two rolled and tumbled down it, still embracing then stopped, hitting a tree. A couple of skiers passed by, seeing them in this entangled state and scoffed to the other. Stan looked up at Tom, who had fallen on top, as Tom looked back down at him.

Stan still stared up at him, tensed. Should he be funny? No, that might piss Tom off. Should he be calm? It was too late for that. He just kind of stayed there, feeling Tom's weight on top of him and sweated, even though it was below twenty out.

Tom was just as frazzled about the situation. He couldn't move for fear of crushing Stan more, that, and his feet were pinned under him. He couldn't say anything to break their awkward silence. Like Stan, Tom began to sweat despite the weather. That's when one of the skiers yelled.

"Go do that in Manhattan! You're not too far off, it's only a few miles away!"

As they ascended up the hill, the awkwardness had disappeared, for neither Tom or Stan could keep a straight face about someone thing they were homosexuals with each other!

Stan broke out his 'gay guy voice.' " That's where we were headed!" he shouted back, cackling as Tom helped him up, and they stumbled back to the apartment, laughing the whole way.

-.--.

"Hey, Mr. F!"

"Oh. Hello, Roxanne. What brings you here?"

"I kinda needed to talk with Candace. I was just headed out."

"Okay. Bundle up. I'll see you later."

"Bye-Q!"

"Darling, what did Roxanne need?"

"Hi, Daddy. Ugh, she kinda wanted me to keep it to myself. It's no big deal, though. Just girl-talk. So, how was your day?"

"Good," Stan replied as she walked over to him. They hugged.

"Ooh. Sweetheart, you're cold. I'm going to make you both some hot cocoa." She walked out of the room as the men got out of their soaking coats and snow pants. "So, you two spent good quality time bonding, right?"

They looked at each other for a second and let out small chuckles.

"You could say that." They grinned, laughing harder.

Buzzzzzz!

Tom went over to the intercom and pressed the button.

"Hello?"

"Hi." Stan's blood boiled. It was Will.

Tom pulled his paw from the button and abruptly turned to his daughter, fear and confusion in his anxious eyes.

"Candace-"

"Why the fuck is he here!" An infuriated Stan yowled.

"Stan, there's no need for that sort of language."

"Candace-"

"Daddy, don't worry. We're just going out for a while."

"Isn't that what we do?"

"It's not a date, Stan. We're just going to do some catching up," she said, fixing her hood and opening the door. Her father and boy-ham blocked the way out.

"Darling, I forbid you from going with him. What if he tries something?"

"I'll make sure he doesn't." Her father was out of the way, but Stan stepped in front, holding her close.

"C'mon baby. Please!" he begged.

"It's going to be fine. I'll be careful. I promise," she soothingly assured and slipped out of his grasp, walking outside, where Will waited on the curb, greeting her with a smile. Tom's and Stan's mouths hung agape.

"B-but Candace!"

16. Doesn't Mean a Thing

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro or the songs I Go Crazy redone by D.H.T. and Hurt by Christina Aguilera.

Author's Note: Hey, all! SilverAngel, hi. Yeah. I updated so fast because you told me to! Heehee. I'm a good listener-er reader, just like all of you are! XD Yeah...thanks for reviewing, SA223!

Chapter Sixteen: Doesn't Mean a Thing

Stan and Tom slumped on the couch like stones, still and hardened, waiting for either Candace to return or for the police to call on Will for hurting her again. The clock in the hall chimed the hour once again with its nine dings and kept ticking, even though in the

mens' minds it had stopped. Ten 'o clock, eleven 'o clock, midnight. Candace had now been gone for five hours, every father and lover's worst nightmare.

Why had she been so naïve, so God damn trusting? Did she really believe that her old childhood friend wouldn't make advances again? Why? Tom knew why. It was because she was just like her mother. Lydia had always said, 'Forgive and forget. Start anew', but toward the end of her very short life, she couldn't live by that anymore for she had become a vengeful soul, holding grudges over the dumbest things, making herself more miserable.

That's when their ears pricked up, hearing the most miraculous noise. Down the hall was the faint, far-off sound of laughter. Candace's giggles to be exact. They rushed to the door, but decided to sit back down as to not seem desperate and to look calm, cool, and collected.

The door slowly creaked open as Candace slipped through it quietly, thinking the others had already gone to bed. Her giggles had stopped so she wouldn't wake up the supposedly sleeping Hams, but that smile still played on her lips. She turned around after hanging up her coat and saw Stan and her father patiently looking at her. Her smile widened.

"You guys waited up for me?" she asked, bewildered.

"Why wouldn't we?"

"I told you there was nothing to worry about."

"So, did you have fun?"

"Yeah. You know, I think he's really sorry about what he did."

"That's what he wants you to thinkâ€|" Stan muttered.

"Hm?"

"Nothin', babe. I'm glad you had fun." Stan sweat dropped.

"What all did you do?"

Candace yawned. "Daddy, can I tell you about it in the morning? I'm bushed!"

"Sure. I better head off myself."

"Coming, Stan?"

"I'll be in there in a bit."

"Okay." She seemed relieved somehow. This made him a bit aggravated.

"Ya know, I think I'll go with you now."

"Okay." That's when Stan noticed a folded slip of paper in her paw

get crumpled up smaller.

-.--.

Later that morning, the first thing Candace did upon waking up was to read the note Will had hurriedly shoved in her paw before leaving. She cautiously peeled Stan's arms from around her middle and gently set them back down, starting to crawl to the foot of her bed where the note lay hidden under it. She groped around in the dark, feeling dust bunnies and the occasional small change until her paw felt the stiff paper. She pulled it up and quietly opened it. In her friend's sloppy writing, she read:

Seems like it was yesterday when I saw your face

_>You told me how proud you were but I walked away

_>If only I knew what I know today

I would hold you in my arms

_>I would take the pain away

_>Thank you for all you've done

_>Forgive all your mistakes

_>There's nothing I wouldn't do

_>To hear your voice again

_Sometimes I want to call you but I know you won't be there _

I'm sorry for blaming you for everything I just couldn't do

_>And I've hurt myself by hurting you

_>Some days I feel broke inside but I won't admit

_>Sometimes I just want to hide 'cause it's you I miss

_>You know it's so hard to say goodbye when it comes to this

Would you tell me I was wrong?

_>Would you help me understand?

—>Are you looking down upon me?

—>Are you proud of who I am?

—>There's nothing I wouldn't do

To have just one more chance

—>To look into your eyes and see you looking back

I'm sorry for blaming you for everything I just couldn't do

—>And I've hurt myself

—>If I had just one more day, I would tell you how much that

—>I've missed you since you've been away

Oh, it's dangerous

—>It's so out of line to try to turn back time

I'm sorry for blaming you for everything I just couldn't do

—>And I've hurt myself

By hurting you

She was so transfixed with the message, she didn't notice that someone was laying his head on her shoulder until he stated after she was finished:

"Well, that's a load of shit!" Stan chuckled.

She squealed in fright. "Oh my gosh! Stan I didn't know you were awake yet."

"That's because I'm quiet and sneaky, like a predator."

"A sexual predatorâ€|" she teased.

"If anyone's _that_, it's your little pervert friend _Will_. You actually believe that junk?"

Her smile faded. "Yes."

"Why? He's not attractive to you, is he?"

"No! â€| Stan, the only one for me is you and you know damn well I wouldn't let someone else get in between us, so stop acting soâ€| childish. There's nothing to worry about. He's probably just trying

to be nice to make up for-"

"_Raping_ you? _Robbing_ you of your _innocence_?"

"Stanley, settle down. I don't like it when you get like this, babyâ€|" She nuzzled him for comfort. "If it'll make you feel better, I'll tell him to stop laying it on so thick."

"Okayâ€|" He reluctantly said and nuzzled back for a while, trying to calm down.

-.--.

"â€| Alright. So after he took me to our old favorite jelly bean shop, he told me to close my eyes. I said no so he just took me anyway, blocking my view so I couldn't tell where we were going. I was really nervous but then I heard other hamsters' voices and then he introduced me to his band. I knew most of them from high school and it was amazing how much they changed! When we went into the bar, they played for a few hours, that's why I didn't come home until it was really late, and the last song was dedicated to _me_! I was so embarrassed! I said, 'Will, what's your problem?' and he just grinned from behind his big drum set. He's really good from being in marching band. I think he should direct-"

"Wait. When did all this start? Did he call you?" Tom asked.

"No. We saw him at the store and he asked me to hang out with him for the evening."

"We?"

"Me and Roxanne."

"I thought she came here."

"She did. We went to the store before that for a pr-"

"A what?"

"â€| A home pregnancy test."

"â€| "

"I told her it was better to go to the clinic, but she said her parents would kill her if they found out. Having eighteen siblings doesn't help with keeping things a secret either. One of them is bound to snitch."

"Why would she need one?"

"â€| "

"Okay, so was sheâ€|?"

"She didn't say. But, I'm guessing no."

"Thank God. That's the last thing that family needs right now."

"Mhmâ€| "

A cluster of envelopes fell through the chute in the door with a subtle plop. Candace walked over to get them and sat back down, sifting through them.

"Bank statement, police schedule, water billâ€|" She handed them to her father. "Junk, credit card, phoneâ€| and one for me!"

She tore it open before Stan could glimpse at the envelope but the writing on the stationary said it all. Another note from Will. (AN: underlined- changed gender.)

_Hello __girl__ it's been a while_

—
>Guess you'll be glad to know

—
>That I've learned how to laugh and smile

—
>Getting over you was slow

—
>They say old lovers can be good friends

—
>But I never thought I'd really see you

_I'd really see you again _

I go crazy

—
>When I look in your eyes

—
>I still go crazy

—
>No my heart just can't hide that old feeling inside

—
>Way deep down inside

—
>Oh baby you know when I look in your eyes

—
>I go crazy

_You say __he__ satisfies your mind_

—
>Tells you all of _his__ dreams_

I know how much that means to you

—

>I realize that I was blind

—
>Just when I thought I was over you

—
>I see your face and it just ain't true

—
>No it just ain't true

I go crazy

—
>When I look in your eyes

—
>I still go crazy

—
>That old flame comes alive

—
>It's starts burning inside

—
>Way deep down inside

—
>Oh baby

—
>You know when I look in your eyes

—
>I go crazy
>
I go crazy_

—
>You know when I look in your eyes

—
>I go crazy

—
>No my heart just can't hide

—
>That old feeling inside

—
>Way deep down inside

—
>I go crazy

—
>You know when I look in your eyes

—

>I go crazy

Crazy

"That does it!" Stan exploded, using his tight pounding fists to hoist himself up from the table. "Will is going to meet his executioner!" Candace shot up and wrapped her arms around his waist from behind with a 'not again' expression on her face. Stan kept resisting and staggered to the door.

"I hope you know I'm not letting go," she grunted, getting dragged along. Tom had a 'WTF?' look on.

"I'll kill him! Absolutely kill him, Candace! He has to stop this shit! Candace, I- What the Hell are you doing?" Candace kept on giving Stan's neck pinchy, little nips, causing it to turn slightly magenta. "Ow! Knock it off!"

"Sit down," she softly ordered in a growl. He did and she massaged his throbbing neck.

-.-.-.

She stood there uncomfortably, on the stoop a few buildings down as he sat, sprawled out comfortably. Her breath was heavy and visible in the cold air as she tried to think of what to say.

"Willâ€|?"

"Yeah?"

"I never knew you could write so good. Those poems-"

"Songs, actually, and thanks. It took me forever to find the right words."

"... Oh. And Will?"

"What?"

"Do you like me?"

"No."

"You don't?"

"No. I love you, Candy."

"That's what I was afraid ofâ€|"

"Why? The little pussy you're seeing keeps you on a short leash?"

"Don't you dare talk about Stan like that! He's a wonderful and compassionate guy who cares about me! That's more than I can say about a certain someone I knowâ€|"

"Look Candace, I'm sorry. It's justâ€|"

"You'll get it later, Star," Maxwell said gently, looking up from the paper.

"Dadddyâ€¦" The little one's eyes poured tears as her face turned beet red and she tore off her pink lacey bib in a revolt.

"Okay, Sweetie, but you can't like, bite at it." Sandy returned the inflated heart, making her child smile once more as she placed part of it in her mouth again, cooing. "Starlette Roseâ€¦" The game began again.

-.--.

Candace pushed Stan down on the bed, giggling, and fell down on him lightly. Nuzzling, she began to rub down his shoulders, sliding her paws down his chest, playing with the hard little buttons on his shirt, undoing the top few. He took her paws from his chest, placing them in his own, and started kissing her deeply. As they kissed, he sat up and leaned forward so that he was on top. She bit his tongue with a playful scowl on.

"Don't act like that. It's my turn," he teased. She laughed.

"Oh, really?"

"There's nothing you can do about it," he gloated.

"Is that so?" She pushed him off of herself and pounced, giggling.

-.--.

After fooling around for a while, Candace left her snoozing boy-ham in their bed and walked downstairs. She walked across the kitchen and knocked on the door to the other half.

"It's unlocked!" Maxwell called. She came in.

"Hi."

"Hi," Sandy replied from the floor where she lay, playing with Starlette.

"Having fun?"

"Did you?" Candace blushed.

"Sandyâ€¦" she whined as her friend laughed.

"So, do you like, have any plans for tonight?"

"Not to my knowledgeâ€¦" Candace seemed a bit sad.

"You don't?" Sandy looked confused. 'Oh Duh! She's like, totally not supposed to know!'

"No. Are you two headed anywhere? I could watch Star if you want."

"Actually, no. Me and Maxy like, thought it would be so cute to see how Starlette like, handles a cake."

"You're already celebrating?"

"No. We're giving her a practice run with a cupcake."

"Awwâ€|" She smiled. "Guess I better stick around to help clean up afterwards."

"Oh, Candy. You don't have toâ€|"

"It's not like I have anything else to doâ€|"

Sandy looked at her husband. 'What are we like, gonna do?'

He seemed to have read her mind and answered, 'We'll just do it earlier so we're not late.' She beamed back in response to his idea.

'Okay.'

-.-.-.

Candace frowned, sitting at the table, sketching slowly. It was supposed to be her Valentine's card for Stan. With each neat stroke she made, her heart bled and her mind went numb from thinking about her relationship's situation.

'Did he forgetâ€|?' she asked, shading in the heart with a red oil pastel. 'Does he even care?' she pondered, working on the elegant black lettering. 'Why am I being so stupid? Of course he does!' A weak smile came across her face. The phone rang and she stood.

"I'll get it!" Stan had practically flew down the stairs and nearly pushed Candace out of his way. An astonished look crept upon her face as he rushed to the phone, picking it up without apologizing or even acknowledging she was there. "Hello? Hey, I've been waiting all day for you. You made it, right? Oh. Thank Godâ€|"

Candace sat back down, closing her eyes tightly and drowning out the conversation. 'Another woman,' she thought. 'He's talking with another womanâ€|' She never saw this coming, nor did she want it. She had always thought they were meant to beâ€|What happened?

Stan's eyes kept darting back to her nervously and he spoke in a low voice, like it was a big secret. Candace was too numb to leave, but thought really hard about it.

'He's even doing it in front of me! The nerve!'

Her early conclusions, self-pity, and deep woe had engulfed her completely, to the point that she was deaf to all of the things that could have made her feel better and could have set her mind at ease. All she heard was, 'I'll see you there at seven. You have the address, right?' and 'Love ya-', 'But, she didn't hear the 'Sir.'â€|

Then, to make matters worse, he ran upstairs to hurriedly grab something that Candace didn't care what it was and threw his jacket

on, nearly stepping out the door when he actually remembered her existence and dashed to the table, giving her a kiss. It lasted longer and felt harder than usual, but that was probably only because he was practicing for the other girl.

"I love you," he said softly but was still sounding rushed. Candace felt as though she had just been lied to- right to her face- at that moment, turning her sweet and tender perspective of this holiday to a much more bitter and sharp one.

Swallowing hard and faking a smile, she trudged into Sandy and Maxwell's part of the home to be with them and the baby as and for company, vainly hoping her mood would pick up with Starlette's antics with the balloon.

-.--.

White, pure as snow, all around the room. The rugs, the walls, the candles and twinkle-lights- All of them were white. The flowers were white, the curtains were white, the large town hall resembled more of an insane asylum right now with such a bright and perfect hue all about it. At least that's how Stan felt at the moment with all of the excitement and anxiety of what tonight's event would be.

He paced around for a while, thinking of how to put his feelings into the right words while fixing little things like the wrinkles in the curtains or the kink in the twinkle-lights' cords. As he walked up the steps, the temporary rug, a fleecy glittering tarp, kept slipping. He tucked it to the wall and walked on it again. Perfect, which is what he hoped this night would be- Perfect, like their love. _Perfect_

He sniffed at one of the pale Hawaiian lilies in one of the pots lined up all across the banister, slowly letting its scent fill his nostrils. He smiled at the fragrance's sweetness as it eased his troubled and worrisome thoughts, silencing it all as he let himself melt away in this moment of such conflicting emotion, fiddling with something small in his coat pocket.

-.--.

"Here you go, Sweetie." Sandy and Maxwell placed the cupcake in front of Starlette. The lights in the joint-kitchen were off so the candle's light would show up better. "Blow it out now." She just looked at it in confusion and amazement.

"Here. Like Mommy." Sandy knelt down and gently blew on the candle, enough to make the flame move, but not enough to put it out. Starlette took in a breath, but started twitching her nose.

"Achoo!" And the candle was out.

"Yay!" her parents cheered, laughing. She clapped and then tore the candle up putting it in her mouth, beginning to chew on the little wax stick.

"No, Starry-" Maxwell pried it away. She bleated.

"Dadddy!"

"Here's something you can eat, Bun." Sandy put the cupcake closer to Starlette, who stuck a few fingers in the pink icing, pulling them out and shoving her whole fist in her tiny mouth, licking it all off. Everyone laughed. Even Candace giggled. Barely, but it was laughter of some sort. She had been awfully quiet for this whole time, but tried to make it go unnoticed as to not to dampen things for everyone else on this lovely Valentine's Eve, even though her heart was chipped and she felt like crying out so the whole world knew of her pain.

'My boy-ham doesn't love me!' She imagined herself screaming on a busy Brooklyn street and no one caring, just walking on. 'My boy-ham doesn't love meâ€|' The words sunk in deeper. Candace lay her head down on the table for a second to collect. She was an actress, and a good one at that, but for the first timeâ€|that skill couldn't help her mask her real emotions as she silently wept.

-.-.-.

"Where is she? Where are they? Sandy and Max should've come with her by nowâ€|" Stan mumbled as his pacing quickened. Tom, who had just arrived minutes before, stood by him like a statue. "Maybe I should call themâ€|" He left for the quiet of upstairs and pulled out his cell phone, punched in the digits, and waited for a signal. As it tried calling, Stan watched more of the Ham-hams filter in, asking if they were late, not seeing Stan or Candace anywhere nearby. He smiled down at them a bit. All of his friends were here, but the one who was most important wasn't.

â€|Riiingâ€|

Riiing! Riiing! Rii-

"Hello?"

"Sandy?"

"Yeah?"

"Where are you supposed to be right now?"

"We kinda have a situationâ€|"

"Oh. And what would that be?"

"Candace thinks you're seeing someone else."

"Huh?"

"Yeah. I dunno. We'll try getting her there soon, okay?"

"Yeah. But please hur-" Click. The call ended.

-.-.-.

"Shit!"

"What?"

"Tom, did Lydia ever think you were cheating on her?"

"No. But, I-"

"Okay. Thanks." More pacing.

"You'reâ€|welcomeâ€|? What seems to be the problem here, son?"

"For some reason, Candace thinks I'm with someone else on the side."

"â€|Are you?"

"No!"

Tom sighed.

-.--.

"Candace, c'mon!" Sandy coaxed. "It'll be fun!"

"You guys can go. I'll stay here with the babyâ€|"

Sandy and Maxwell exchanged looks. 'That kinda defeats the purposeâ€|' They sweat dropped.

"Please? It'll be fun! Like, ya gotta trust me here, girlfriend!"

"No thanks. I just want to stay hereâ€|" Her voice kept fading off.

"Candyâ€|You'll have a lot of fun! Please? It'll like, take your mind off of things."

"â€|Nopeâ€|"

-.--.

'Okay. It's only been twenty minutes. No sweat, right? They'll be here any minute.'

"Hey, guys, can you tell me when they get here?" Stan asked several groups of Hams.

"Sure." With that, he retreated upstairs to be alone. _'Candace, if you can hear meâ€|'_

-.--.

"Please, Candy? Please?"

_ 'â€|I never loved anyone else so muchâ€|'_

"Noâ€|"

"C'mon! Live a little! You can have fun without my brother!"

_ 'â€|I never will againâ€|'_

"No."

"You'll have fun!"

'â€|I wouldn't hurt you on purposeâ€|'

"No!"

"Candace, you have to come!"

'â€|Forgive meâ€|'

"Give me a good reason to!"

They gave up. It was time the truth came outâ€|not quite.

"There was going to be a party for you and Stan. You know, like an anniversary oneâ€|"

Her heart softened with her cousin's whimpering puppy dog voice.

"T-there was?"

'â€|Like you saidâ€|I love youâ€|'

"Yeah. And there still is. That's why Stan left earlier."

'â€|I always haveâ€|'

"Really?"

'â€|I'll never stopâ€|'

"Yeah. And if we like, hurry, we'll still make it," Sandy added.

'â€|And like I told your fatherâ€|

â€|I will love you for forever and a dayâ€|'_

"Yes. So are you going to come now?"

'â€|I mean this. Every wordâ€|Please come to me, my loveâ€|'

"Yeah. Alrightâ€|Just give me a second."

.--.

It was getting late and the knots tightened in Stan's stomach. He fiddled with the satin cube, opening and closing it like a square, black oyster. Instead of a pearl, it bore a gorgeous diamond ring. He watched it glint and change colors in the dim light when he moved it to different angles. The elaborate trinket of affection had set him back about two months' pay, but he didn't care at all. It was the most perfect one at the jeweler's for her.

The gem was clear and perfectly cut, cradled in the fourteen karat

gold that was attached to the dainty little ring. The golden pegs wrapped around it elegantly like waves jutting up and stretching out to less than a centimeter from the very shiny top, but those weren't the best features by far. Not even close.

Tom, who sat down with him in the dark back room broke him from his thoughts.

"Are you going to let her go?"

"No. Not unless she wants me toâ€|"

"She'll come around."

"I hopeâ€|I just don't know how to explain to her that she's the only one for me..."

"Isn't that what you're doing tonight?" His eyes twinkled, glancing at the ring. Stan put on a small smile.

"Yeah. I guess soâ€|" He even began to chuckle, the regular trademark Stan smile returning to his face.

-.--.

The big door swung open with a heavy creak. Candace's big brown eyes twinkled in wonderment as a small gasp left her. The room was the prettiest scene she'd ever seen. She felt like she was in heaven, smelling sweetness in the air. As the aroma strengthened, she felt as though she were walking on air because the glittery tarp rug resembled thin, fluffy clouds hanging over a sea of constellations.

Soft piano music played in the background as she conversed with the others. Something in their voices didn't seem right- like something was up. She shook the feeling and asked numerous Hams, 'Where's Stan?' during the few minutes she chatted. She didn't have enough time to let those nasty little thoughts seep back in, for the ceiling lights and stereo turned off, leaving the room dim and quiet. Nobody looked scared or even surprised and all became more silent, as though expecting this.

The big light in the center of the room shone where Candace stood and one followed some noise off to the right.

"What took you so long?" Boss finally asked. The others nodded.

She replied quickly to the cluster in a whisper.

"I'm sorry. I was helping clean up the destruction area by Star's highchair. Sandy and Max decided to give her a tiny test- cake and she smooshed it all up and got it everywhere! It was so ador- Oh my God."

She and the others looked in the direction of the sound and saw Stan slowly, quietly approach. As he neared the center from which everyone else had stepped back, Tom came down and blended in with the group.

Candace didn't know who to run up to and hug, but she picked Stan and

leapt into his arms. He backed up soon after, making her feel dejected as she slightly hung her head. He placed his paw on her cheek with his thumb below her chin and picked it back up, looking into her eyes tenderly with a soft smile etched on his face as he grabbed her paws in his and knelt down on one knee.

"Candaceâ€¦" he began. "We've been through a whole lot of stuff together. Some bad, a lot really goodâ€¦ And I know I've put you through a lot- you've done the same- but, I think that's what made us stronger. When I'm with you, it's like nothing bad can happen. And if it does, you make me feel strong enough to take care of whatever is in our wayâ€¦" He took in a small breath before continuing. "Growing up, I always saw myself as a whole being. But, when I met you just a little over two years ago, I realized that I was only a part something so miraculous. I realized that it was you who made me complete. I feel so empty without you, Candace. You don't even knowâ€¦ I know I've asked a lot out of you this past year, but do you think you could do me yet another favor?" She looked down at him with confused, expecting eyes as he let her paws go and reached into his coat pocket, pulling out the little black box and opened it, revealing the ring.

He took the ring out of its case and presented the most important part to her. Not the gem, not the golden band, but the message written on it. Engraved in tiny glinting letters, it said: _'Forever and a dayâ€|'_

She gasped and covered her mouth with both paws, eyes watering. Everyone held in their breath, hoping her response would be much better than what it was at the wedding reception as the tears dribbled down Candace's cheeks. They fell from her eyes, glittering, and got absorbed in the sparkly white rug in which they landed upon.

"Will you marry me?"

Plip. Plip.

```
"â€¦_Yes_â€¦"
```

THE END.

A horizontal sequence consisting of 20 pairs of a minus sign followed by a dot, totaling 40 symbols.

Well, that's it, everyone! I hope you enjoyed! I told you it would take a while! Thank you all for taking the time to read this! And here is a special thanks to all of my reviewers! (Stick around or scroll down because I have yet another announcement.)

Elric 24- My best buddy! You helped me a lot with improving this fic. Thanks so much for the idea to on how to end this thing and for correcting my terrible punctuation in dialogue! I lurf you!

— • — • — •

SilverAngel 223- You were so sweet and nice to me! I'm glad you liked my story and I hope you write another one soon! You're such a great friend, doing all that work to catch up! I really appreciate it!

-.-.-.

lupyne- Again, my number one reviewer! You've always been there for me and had a lot of nice things to say, even if I was confusing and/or inaccurate! XD You're also very polite! I'm glad you and I are friends. It's great to know I have support out there.

(Not that I'm saying Elric 24 and SilverAngel haven't been supportive! XD)

-.-.-.

A final note: Should I post an epilogue? Put it in your review if you'd like one and I'll try to get it up ASAP, k? I have a few ideas right now, but I don't know if I can make them work at the moment... That, and I might start another fic soon- eventually (dunno.), but I don't know who to write first- Mecca or Josie. I'll let you guys vote in your reviews. (If you're lost, go to my profile and scroll to the bottom.) Anywayâ€|

****THANKS SO MUCH, YOU LOYAL READERS!****

18. Epilogue

REVISED! Subtly...XD Not by much.

Disclaimer: I do not own anything from the show Hamtaro. Bah...

AN: Okay! Here it is! Um...Yeah! XD Sorry for the delay! I've been very busy with school and had a terrible case of writers' block, so forgive me for that and this not-up-to-my-standards-but-had-to-post-it-up-anyway-because-it-was-the-best-thing-I've-come-up-with-thus-far chapter! This is the real end, so I hope you like it despite it's somewhat sloppiness and rushed-ness! XD I won't be able to update anything else until exmas are over on friday, so yeah...Hopefully I'll have an idea or two for ny other fics. I've already thanked most of my readers and reviewers, but here we go again! I need to give a special thanks to my newest one, Cherrie-Sakura! Thank you so very much, friend! I'm glad you liked my fics so much! I don't like this one as much, so you can hit me. LOL. And, for the other peeps who I've already talked toâ€|THANKS SOOOOOO MUCH, ALL! Enjoy the last chapter! Yay!

Chapter Eighteen: Epilogue

â€|"Do you, Stanley Williams, take Miss Fox as your lawfully wedded wife- to have and to hold, to honor and cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer- as long as you both shall live?"

For another rare time, Stan was solemn. He looked into the screened-over eyes of his fiancÃ©e of merely three months and smiled. A foggy smile was returned from behind the veil as Candace's grip on his paws tightened a little.

"I do," he replied to the priest.

"And do you, Candace Fox, take Mr. Williams as your lawfully wedded husband-

to have and to hold, to honor and cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer- as long as you both shall live?"

Her eyes twinkled at Stan, whose emerald ones shined back and the two smiled at each other again, paws tightly laced together. Candace tilted her head slightly down and blushed harder.

"I do," she breathed, looking back up with a large smile to match Stan's radiant grin.

"Young man, may we please have the rings?" The priest asked Cappy, who had watery eyes and was twitching his nose frantically. There was a pause.

"Achoo!" The boy faced away from the velvet pillow and sneezed on Panda's shoe. He sniffled, handing it to the priest. "Here you go."

"Thank you! These rings are a symbol of eternal love. As the circle, it is a never ending-"

"Hey!" All eyes were on Panda for disrupting the ceremony. He flailed away from his younger brother, who had his face buried in Panda's jacket, and screeched upon seeing the slimy damage. He tossed his arms out to his sides and slapped them to his legs. "Every time! You always have to wipe your nose on something!"

Candace stifled her giggles, remembering what happened at the last wedding she'd laughed at, but hearing Maxwell's and the priest's chuckles behind her made her feel comfortable enough to join, so she laughed.

"Well, I can't help it! Plus, it's not like I asked to be Ring Bear again," Cappy retorted with a raspberry, causing everyone to roar with laughter.

Candace began to fall and Stan caught her, chuckling loudly himself. She laughed into his chest as the priest sat down right where he stood, cradling his shaking head in his paws, tittering as well. Everyone in the pews laughed, including Will, who had broken out of his melancholic shell to softly chuckle.

Back at the altar, the Bride's Maids, Pashmina, Bijou, and Roxanne, giggled boisterously, as well as the Maids of Honor, Lakin and Sandy, who despite her unhealthy pale complexion was snorting from laughing so hard. Everyone's favorite flower girl, Penelope, toppled from her giggles, fueling the noise. Pashmina tried to help her up, but couldn't, for she was chortling too much. After a minute or two of this chaos, all was silent and the priest began.

"These rings-" he snickered shortly, regaining his composure as Candace smiled at him. "These rings are a symbol of eternal love. Not because of the engraving on them of this joyous date, but because as the circle, this couple's love will never end. Their journey together shall be continuous as well and the love shared between them shall become stronger than this gold as time passes. Now, I give them these rings to place upon each others' finger as they read their vows."

"Stan, I know we started out in a weird way" hers began. "Candace, we've been through so much together" his started. Both told mainly the same story, but with small twists, and they ended nearly identically. "Like you said to me" "Like I told you and your father" "I will love you forever" "and a day." The two exchanged rings.

"Now, with the power invested in me, I pronounce you man and wife. You may n- continue kissing the bride" he sweat dropped at the already lip-locked couple as everyone applauded, some laughing.

"Mmmmm" Candace softly moaned, pulling away from him, smiling. Stan looked into her slightly mascara smeared eyes and gently chuckled. He took his thumbs and brushed at them slowly. "It looks that bad, huh?"

"No. You're beautiful," Stan whispered. She blushed as her nose received a soft peck and he took her paw, walking her down to the pews as everyone stood up to see the couple off.

Running up the aisle with her new husband, Candace glanced at the front pew where her father sat weepily. She envisioned Lydia sitting with him, crying as well and felt a small, sad pang. Turning around, she looked at the ones still at the altar chatting and was concerned at seeing Sandy's still ill state from earlier this morning. She and the others smiled and waved. She waved back, picturing Kendra up there as another Maid of Honor. She missed the women so much and longed for them to be here on her greatest day, making her sad. Then she peeked over at Stan, instantly remembering why today was so wonderful and ran faster in pure glee.

As they continued dashing, one of the flower pots by the altar shattered after its stand was upset. The expected light thud from the stand falling was replaced by a louder one, causing Candace and Stan to stop. They whipped their heads around and gasped with the many others.

"Sandy!"

-.--.

When she came to, the first thing Sandy saw was a loose strand of Candace's hair swinging slightly back and forth. Her friend's humming and warm embrace along with the hair pendulum made her want to fall back asleep. Sandy then realized she was sitting in the other woman's lap, had her head on her friend's shoulder, and was being gently held around her belly. Awkwardness shocked her out of her fuzzy, half-dreaming state.

"C-Candace?"

"Hey! Nice to have you back!" She whispered.

"W-why are you like, holding me this way?" Candace flushed.

"Don't take it the wrong way. I was trying to pick you up with Stan since Max had to calm down Star and you fell on me. We didn't want to move you in case you concussed yourself and something more serious would happen."

"Ohâ€¦ Well, I'm like, fine. So you totally don't have to like, worry anymore," Sandy said, slowly standing up on woozy legs. Candace stood as well, her eyes still concerned. "Like, what?"

"I told you you should have stayed home this morning after you vomited. If you're this sick, you should-"

"I wasn't gonna like, miss yours and my brother's wedding for the world! Even if I had a like, hundred and five temperature, I would still totally be here. You or anyone else could so not change my mind. I love you guys too much and would die if I missed this."

"Awwâ€¦ Sandy, you're the best!" Candace embraced her. She weakly smiled. "Should we get you to a doctor, though?"

"Nah. I probably just passed out from like, you and Stan kissing like that. When I have a cold, I get like, worked up over totally silly things," she said, winking, and walked off. Candace frowned.

-.--.

â€¦ "She said she passed out from our kiss. I don't know why, but I can't believe that, Stan!" A hysterical Candace looked ready to sob.

"Maybe she just couldn't stand our heatâ€¦" Stan grinned. "Heh. Maxwell must not be too exciting in the bedroom."

"STAN!" Candace lightly slapped her chuckling husband. "What if she's really sick and isn't telling us? What if it's deadly? What if it's already too late to help her?" He looked at her and touched her cheek comfortingly.

"Babe, I know my sister. She'd tell us if something was wrong or if she were in danger. Trust me," Stan quietly assured, kissing her deeply, getting deeper as she backed up to the wall and he gently pressed her against it. She pulled away a little and smiled, placing her nose on his.

"Just can't wait for tonight to get in my pants, eh?" Stan goofily chuckled.

"You're not wearing pantsâ€¦" She giggled, looking out at the others. Tom waved her over.

"I have to go dance with my dad now. I'll see you later." The two pecked, but Stan again, deepened it. "Stanley, I mean it. I have to go."

"Okayâ€¦" He got in one last smooch.

-.--.

Stan and Candace were spun around simultaneously. Candace still danced with Tom and Stan was gruffly addressed by Will.

"Hey, buddy!" Stan nervously greeted.

"Hey! You lucky bastard!" Will cheered and whapped him hard on the back. The two watched the bride and her father dance in silence for a minute. "She's quite a girl, is she not?"

"Yeahâ€|" Stan mused.

"Wanna know what? I think she made the right choice. I just wish you guys would've waited more than a few months to get married, thoughâ€|" Stan was about to explain that this had been Candace's idea to get married on her mother's birthday, but Will spoke again. "Wanna know what else? You better not hurt Candace or I'll slaughter you right in front of her." With that nicely haunting note, a grinning Will skipped off, whistling, making Stan gulp.

-.--.

"Is Will gonna kill me?" Stan hugged Candace like a scared child would.

"What do you mean by that?â€|Oh! No. He says that to all my boyfriends. He just never got the chance to say it to you yet. Plus, I wouldn't let him lay a paw on you. That's my job." She winked, giggling. "Do you know how your sister is?"

"No. But, I heard she's doing a little better."

"That's good." Candace concluded their conversation before making the first cut in their strawberry iced vanilla cake.

-.--.

Roxanne walked away from the table where Sandy sat as Candace took her spot. She plopped down next to her and smiled.

"Are you feeling better or did you just put on more make-up?"

"Umâ€|Like, the second oneâ€|?" Sandy sheepishly replied, sweat dropping.

Candace sighed. "Do you know what's making you so sick or should we get you checked out?"

Sandy looked down, flushing. "I know what's wrong with meâ€|"

Candace scooted closer and hugged her best friend/ sister-in-law. "Will you tell me? You know you can say anything to me, right?"

"Wellâ€|" Sandy pulled her friend closer and whispered in her ear. She pulled away, gasping and cried.

"Oh, Sandy!" The two hugged again, sobbing as Maxwell came over. They sniffled and wiped their eyes as to not look suspicious.

"Here you go." He handed his wife a glass of wine. Candace shot up.

"Oh! She doesn't drink!" she said, taking it from Sandy.

"And since when do you?"

"Ughâ€|Now!" She turned he back to them, pretending to drink the alcohol while actually spilling it into a plant holder nearby.
"See?"

"Whooo! Go, Candy!" Lakin yowled in support from across the room.

Maxwell looked utterly confused. Sandy frowned at this. Her guilt ridden mind made her feel terrible and she knew she had to tell him what was going on soon.

-.--.

Almost everyone was on the dance floor, including Sandy and Maxwell. As he spun her, another wave of nausea came over her and her knees bent slightly. Her husband looked terribly concerned, adding to her remorse. She tried to shake the dizzy sick feeling and smiled at him weakly. He returned it.

"Do you want to sit out now?"

"Mhmâ€|" Sandy slowly nodded as he walked her to the table where Bijou sat with their daughter. Candace watched with a faint smirk, knowing he didn't want to stop just then. She waved to him.

"Max! C'mon!" Turning to her husband, she asked, "You don't mind, do you?"

"Nah. Plus, I need a break." They quickly kissed as Stan presented her to Maxwell. He looked reluctant.

"Are you sure you'll be alright?"

"I'm just feeling like, a little faint again. It's no big deal. Go." He smiled gratefully and went to his cousin as Sandy slowly picked up a drowsy Starlette.

-.--.

Candace turned her back to the group of single women and tossed her bouquet as Sandy walked slowly over to Maxwell, who hugged her.

"Something on your mind, darling?" he asked with that same pout from before.

"Maxy, I'mâ€|"

"Ooh! Ooh!" One lady yelled, backing up.

"Gonnaâ€|"

"I almost got it!" Another called.

"Have another baby."

"Yes! I caught it!" Pashmina screamed, grabbing the bunch of flowers in the air.

"Ugh?" Maxwell turned as pale as his "ill" wife and fainted.

Everyone looked at him, knowing- or at least guessing- what Sandy had told him, based from her giggles and blush and his reaction, and laughed, applauding as the newlyweds danced, chuckling too, thinking about having their own children someday.

Stan stopped his laughter and turned back to Candace with a more serious expression on yet again.

"Candace? Why did you give up on your dream of making it big to marry me?"

She smiled, looking at him lovingly. "Because being with you is more important to me than Hollywood ever will be." Their lips met tenderly.

Stan spun Candace around one last time. Her frilly white dress brushed against his leg as it expanded. She looked into his eyes as he gazed back into hers.

It was amazing. Their friendship had begun at a wedding, and now it was ending at one. Their ownâ€|

19. Bside and Bonus

Disclaimer: I don't own Hamtaro in any way, shape, or form. All of that credit goes elsewhere.

AN: So, yeah. I was leafing through a lot of old notes and came across these. I thought they were decent, and since I haven't given much to you guys (and girls! Haha) lately, I decided to post 'em. They aren't the best out there (that's why I didn't have them in the final story), but I hope they're at least worth a look! Thanks again, all! Hope you like! /The chapter is the "B-side" to the one you've already seen. The segment is the "Bonus"./ lol

Love's A Luxury (Friendship is a Sorry Excuse) Original First Chapter

Stan walked into the saloon on 35th street. Sandy and Maxwell were at the hotel on 22nd. He didn't bother asking them to come along. He only wanted to be alone and besides, they didn't do very much lately.

As he stepped into the bar, he realized the atmosphere matched his mood: bleak, dim, a bit unsureâ€| He sat down and ordered a beer.

While sipping the beverage, he noticed two pretty girls gawking and giggling towards him like schoolgirls. Last year, he would have gone all out for them. This year, after realizing that love wasn't to be taken for granted, he shied away. If they approached, he'd go somewhere else. He was not yet ready to love again, to have his heart broken once more. At this moment in time, he was very fragile.

Fragile indeed. The women oozing over him were probably drunk.

The girls looked at their watches. Stan figured they were ready to leave because the couple walked to the counter up front to pay their bill and began to walk towards the door. At they passed, the red head placed a napkin on his table. He picked it up and read it before shoving it carelessly into his pocket.

It was hard to make the note out at first due to the lighting, and paper's blinding hue didn't help either. When his eyes had adjusted, he made out two phone numbers. Along with the digits were two kiss marks. One was fire engine red and the other a lighter fuchsia. Then he noticed something written below the first number. 'Call me!'. It had been crossed out, by the other one he supposed. Under the second number was written 'Call ME!' Normally, it was nice to be fought over, but he simply crumpled up the stale perfume-scented thing and put it in his pocket half-heartedly and half intoxicated.

As he did so, his heart jumped at something his eyes hadn't yet seen. Sitting on the piano was The Heartbreaker, and yet she looked heart_broken_.

Stan's emerald eyes widened. He took in a quick breath. Rubbing his lids with the backs of his paws, he realized she was real. Not fake, phony, a hoax—Real. And that's what scared the shit out of Stan the most.

-.-.-.

Candace lay down on her back, staring up at the ceiling. It was a lonely winter's night with nothing to do, so she wound up there after rehearsal. The pianist, bless his soul, tried focusing on his music, but kept stealing glimpses of her legs, her chest- busted!

Candace sat up again and looked directly at him.

"Hey!" she said. He swallowed hard. Had he stared too long? He wondered this nervously. "Do you know 'The Piano Man' by Billy Joel?" The man sighed a sigh of relief and began a new song. Her eyes twinkled a bit as she let out a hallow laugh. Stan shivered. That wasn't the laugh he had known and deeply loved. Those were not natural twinkles in her eyes. They even looked store-bought in a way. That wasn't Candace Fox; that was an imposter. Stan swore by it.

"Can you play any Eric Carmen songs?" The man nodded, smiling and started to play "All By Myself".

Candace couldn't pretend anymore. Pressure built up behind her eyes. She didn't want this man to pity or feel bad for her. She couldn't get herself to act like she was okay. She hadn't been able to do that since the year before. Instead of trying to fail, she hopped down from the piano and walked- no jogged- no, sprinted out of the bar into the snow storm. Before exiting though, she tightened her coat and squashed her hat on top of her head, messing up her hair.

-.-.-.

After downing two more beers, Stan left the bar. The snow came down

harder now than earlier. Walking down the sidewalk, he noticed a young woman sitting on a bench. A taxi slowed near her. She waved it off naturally, as if she had done it many times before this evening. She probably had with the looks of the white powder piled up on her hat and shoulders. This confused Stan, though. It was below zero out he was sure and yet she still sat under the flickering streetlight. Was she waiting for someone in particular? Was she waiting for him? Stan noticed who she was once he got closer.

He stood over her, blocking the snow with his back. Candace looked up at him in partial shock. They stayed like this for a moment.

In the minutes of silence, well as silent as it could be for New York, Stan stared at her. She stared back. Stan noticed her shed tears were beginning to form little icicles on her whiskers. Candace saw that his unshed ones were creating icicles around his heart. They both realized that someone needed to break the ice.

"What are you doing here?" Candace slowly asked finally. Her teeth chattered.

"Sandy and Max said they didn't want me to spend the holidays alone, so they invited me to stay with them while Max is on business."

"Ohâ€¦ How are they, by the way?"

"Expecting."

"Really? That's great." Candace meant to sound excited, but it came out numb. Awkward silence followed.

"What are _you _doing here, Miss Hollywood?" Stan tried to come off as mean, but he genuinely wanted to know.

"Not filming because I didn't make itâ€¦"

Now he felt bad, but he couldn't show it. "Oh. Sorry."

"No. It's great. I'm on a TV show here called Saturday Night Live. Ever hear of it?" Candace felt completely stupid for asking, remembering that SNL was one of Stan's favorite programs.

"Yeahâ€¦" Crickets. Silence. "Let's get outta here. Don't wanna freeze to death!" Candace got up. They started walking.

-.--.

They strolled around aimlessly for hours, chatting and acting as though they knew each other again. Candace's real laugh even emerged from its year-long slumber. She grabbed his paw, ending the awkwardness.

â€¦ "So, what about the doctor?" Candace asked with interest to Stan's made-up joke which he had forgot about in his drunken state.

"Ah, screw the doctor!"

"Is that an invitation?" Stan laughed so hard, he snorted. Candace

joined him. They continued walking.

Candace began walking backwards after some more time had passed, toward a building.

"What are you doing?"

"This is my apartment." She pointed four stories up and two to the left, from the center of the somewhat graffitied place.

"So, I guess this is goodnight?"

"Yeahâ€¦ Hope to see you around. How long are you, Max, and Sandy staying?"

"About a week and a half."

"Okay." Somebody buzzed her in. She waved goodbye. Stan imitated.

-.--.

Stan walked into the room.

"Stanley, where have you been? It's almost midnight!" Sandy scolded.

"I was just hanging out for a while, sis. I ran into an old friendâ€¦"

His twin had a look of dread etched on her face.

"Candace?" she guessed. Stan's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Just a friend."

He smiled. He was glad Candace took his paw because the ending of their awkwardness only meant a beginning for their new friendship. It was still too early to tell whether destiny had lied to him or not.

Original Story Excerpt (Cht. 9 or 10) (edited out)

â€¦ On their first anniversary, they made love. They didn't have to be married. Stan was sure she was The One, as he did two years ago. But nowâ€¦ Things had changed quite a bit. Now, when he looked into her chocolate eyes, he could see their unborn children, whereas back then he only saw his own reflection.

-.--.

Candace lay in his arms, exhausted and weak. Stan pulled her closer. He felt her soft, slowing panting of her breath on his neck. They looked into each others eyes, letting them grow heavy as they fell into a blissful sleep.

'I love youâ€¦'

-.--.

"Stan?" Sandy opened Stan's door to his part of the house. "Stan!" she called up the stairs again. She sighed, walking up them.

She approached her brother's bedroom and gently tapped on the door. She could be mature about this, right?

She swung the door open, preparing to rip off all the sheets and drag him out of his bed until—

Oh.

She noticed two sets of clothing on the floor. One pile was her brother's and the other belonged to Candace. Sandy gasped as her chills told her to get out of there. She gently pulled the door shut and bounded down the steps, into the joint kitchen.

Before her mind could send the message to her to tell Maxwell 'Stan's gonna be late for breakfast.', it sent her the answer to his inevitable question, 'Why?'

"Stan and Candace had sex," she blurted to her husband, who jolted up from his seat by the baby's highchair, startling her as well.

Maxwell desperately tried forming sentences, but his thoughts buzzed out as quickly as they had buzzed in so he couldn't ask anything. His last resort was

"Huh?" Finally, questions came. "Are you sure? How do you know?" Sandy shot him a look. "I mean, don't think I don't believe you, 'cause I do. It's just— Well, they've only been dating for a year now—"

"Stan and Candace," Sandy started in a tone someone would use to read Shakespeare, "are like, a very fiery and passionate couple. It was bound to happen."

"But—"

"I know, Maxy. I know." Sandy walked to the fretting ham and wrapped her arms around him.

"What if she ends up pregnant?"

"My bro will do the right thing."

Everything stayed quiet like that for the duration of breakfast. Their daughter cooed and drabbled once in a while, but besides that, all was silent—

-.-.-.

"Do you want me to make breakfast?" Sandy and Maxwell heard from the kitchen in their spot on the couch.

"Stan, I don't mean to sound rude, but it's almost one o'clock."

"So?" This made Candace smile.

"Sure," she answered, rolling her eyes playfully with a giggle.

.....

Thank you again! I appreciate your time!

End
file.